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ROMAN RELIGIOUS PRACTICE AND BELIEF IN PLAUTUS

by

(C) CONSTANCE SHIRLEY HAWRYLUK

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Dedication

To my parents in gratitude for their

support through the years.

Abstract

The period in which Plautus lived and composed his plays was characterized by much social, political and religious upheaval. The confusion generated by the rapid influx into Italy of foreign religious beliefs and mystery cults resulted in a widespread skepticism not only about the value of habits of worship, but also about the existence of divinities themselves. Furthermore, the State cult at Rome discouraged the ordinary citizen from an active participation in forms of public worship. Disassociation from the means of expressing a personal faith caused some Romans to lay aside altogether practice of the sanctities and rituals handed down and fostered over the generations. For other citizens an awe of the gods and a sense of their divine presence and concern for human affairs became considerably weakened. Finally, the reduction of State religion to the status of being a 'handmaiden' of Roman government policy led to an abuse of religion and of the sacred offices that had hitherto been held in respect.

Plautus has been criticized by some recent scholars who claim that the poet must bear a share of the responsibility for the religious cynicism of the period. It is argued that Plautus, whether inadvertently or deliberately, inculcated through the comedies a spirit of irreverence in his audience. The purpose of this thesis is to examine the frequent instances of religious belief and practice found in Plautus' works to demonstrate that the playwright did, in fact, support the importance of devotional habits and attitudes for his audience. Separate chapters consider such issues as tributary sacrifice, participation in festivals, and attendances upon the temples; the significance

of omens, augury, and dreams; and finally, the reaffirmation of divinity as seen in the portrait of Iuppiter in Amphitruo, and of the ethical values, pietas and fides, that are expressive of a belief in an all-seeing god.

The thesis concludes that Plautus' characters are shown cultivating a variety of pieties and religious ceremonies because these practices are of real assistance to them, particularly at moments of stress and personal insecurity. Frequent attendance upon temples and the need to retain the sacred aura of the dies festi reveal another aspect of Plautus' concern for proper religious observance. Moreover, the poet suggests through the portrayal of individuals like Daemones (Rudens) and Alcmena (Amphitruo) that the life led in accordance with the Roman moral virtues of pietas and fides insures the blessings and the material rewards of the gods. Throughout all the plays Plautus encourages the worship of those gods who are especially of Roman origin or reshaping. The incorporation of such a diversity of religious material into the comedies suggests that Plautus may not be regarded as flippant in matters of belief. The dignity of personal religion is upheld and religious activity is shown to enrich human experience.

Acknowlegement

I wish to thank Dr. Rosemary Nielsen for her aid, guidance and encouragement in the preparation of this thesis.

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Chapter One

The Life and Works of Plautus

It is surprising that so little is known about the life and the career of Plautus. He was not only one of the most popular writers in antiquity, but more of his works have been handed down to us than any other Greek or Roman literary figure. Yet the 'facts' about Plautus may nearly all be traced back to legend; hence they are the subject of much controversy among scholars. The traditional account of Plautus' life is derived principally from brief remarks scattered through works of Cicero, from Noctes Atticae of Aulus Gellius, who quotes Varro but relies heavily upon his own penchant for story-telling, and from Jerome.[1] The credibility of most of these details has been persuasively challenged by Leo[2] who demonstrates that their origin is found either in the formulae of literary convention or in plain invention. Not even Plautus' name is attested to by the ancients with any consistency. Titus Maccius Plautus is the regular form, but the correct spelling and meaning of the nomen Maccus (or Maccius) remains uncertain.[3] It is usually held that the playwright acquired both the names Maccius and Plautus during the initial years he spent working in the theatre. Maccius possibly comes from the term for the clown, a standard character of Roman farce; the cognomen Plautus, meaning "flat-footed" or "broad-footed", is a technical word applied to the bare-footed actor in Latin mime.[4]

Titus Maccius Plautus was born in Sarsina in the territory of Umbria around 254 B.C. He is thought to have travelled as a youth to Rome where he took up work as a stage assistant or perhaps as a carpenter.[5] Not long afterwards he graduated to the position of an actor[6], and his success at this undertaking is generally recognized. Evidently sufficient capital was obtained from this occupation to allow Plautus to speculate on some sort of commercial dealing which took him away from Rome, but the venture was short-lived. Failure at a business transaction, however, did result in a happy turning point in his career. For it was at this time that Plautus probably came into his first contact with the Greeks, becoming exposed to their language, culture and to the wealth of their literary heritage. Plautus returned to Rome, financially impoverished and compelled to seek employment as a miller's labourer.[7] All of his spare time was spent on the composition of comic plays[8] or, more probably, on the adaption of Greek New Comedies for presentation on the Roman stage. During his middle years Plautus became increasingly recognized for his accomplishments as a skillful adaptor of Greek originals for the tastes of his Roman audience. Tradition records that his contributions to the Roman stage were publicly honoured by the gift of citizenship.[9]

Plautus should not be regarded as simply a 'translator' of Greek material. His works are infused with a demonstrable originality and versatility. The plays reveal that he was less concerned with the reader of comedy than with the requirements and the enjoyment of live theatre. There is evidence both in the formation of scenes and in the building of plot and character that Plautus brought to bear on his art

all the techniques and experience gained from his activity as a stage-hand. Plautine comedy shows its inspiration in a foreign model since the setting of the scenes and the names of the characters remain nominally Greek. Yet Plautus' intense concern with the problems and issues of contemporary life, with the exposition of a peculiarly Roman set of manners and values[10] and, finally, with the creation of a lively Italic metre and dramatic diction is clearly reflected by the plays.

It is important to examine briefly the historical period in which Plautus lived and how his treatment of the genre of comedy marks a significant contribution to the artistic traditions of his predecessors. Plautus came to Rome and began his work in the theatre at some date between the end of the First Punic War (241 B.C.) and the beginning of the Second (218 B.C.).[11] His arrival coincides with a new awakening among the Romans to the attractions of literature and to its potential to give expression to and support national ideals and activity. The military victory over their political foe, Carthage, gave the Roman people a real opportunity to balance their policy of political expansion with pursuits of a more civilized nature. They had long been in contact with the Greek colonies in southern Italy. One of the allied cities, Syracuse, was renowned in antiquity as a great cosmopolitan centre.[12] It was there that Rome became acquainted with the intellectual and artistic superiority of Greek literature. Performances of Greek tragedy and comedy were readily available, and were a part of the special reputation achieved by Syracuse. The Romans, by nature an impatient race, lost no time in appropriating the dramatic

genre for themselves or in reshaping the medium to suit their own national identity. As early as 240 B.C. the Romans viewed the first performance of a Greek play in Latin at the Ludi Romani ('Roman Games'). Plautus himself may have been a member of the audience.

This first remodeling of Greek Comedy is a labour usually attributed to Livius Andronicus of Tarentum, who had assumed Roman ways after being taken by them as a prisoner of war. The new literary form is named Fabula Palliata because the actors wear the pallium, a garment that very closely resembles the χλαμύς , a characteristic Greek dress. The plots and characters of the Roman drama are drawn from the Greek New Comedy of the fourth and third centuries B.C. Although it is difficult to trace the exact lineage of what is borrowed from the Greek because of the paucity of extant sources, the most commonly used Greek plays appear to be those of Diphilus, Demophilus, Philemon and Menander. Plautus' immediate predecessor, Naevius,[13] further developed the Fabula Palliata, but its immense popularity at Rome and its survival throughout the centuries owes much to the genius of Plautus. The influence of Greek New Comedy upon the work of Plautus is clear, especially in the matter of plot and theme. The Greek originals manifest a strong concern with the significance of everyday life. The focus is upon the individual or the family unit. Matters of political or public policy enter the drama only if they directly affect the activity or the attitude of a character. The use of comedy to address in a satirical way contentious social and political issues had long since disappeared from the Greek stage. Plautus' is indebted to the genre of Greek New Comedy for such themes as: love, domestic

conflict, mistaken identity, and the personal consequences of vices like adultery, rape, debauchery, etc. In some instances it is even possible to identify the Greek original for a Plautine work.[14]

Before the invention of Fabula Palliata there were already in existence, in Italy, several native roots of popular comedy.[15] There are four major sources. First, the Fescennine Verses, which consist of amoebaic exchanges of rustic abuse or jest. These verses were possibly accompanied by gestures that would be appropriate to the setting of a wedding or to a harvest festival. Second, the Satura (literally: 'a plank laden with food'), which consists of dialogue and gesture set to music. Third, the mime, a rudimentary species of farce in which dancing and gestures are important features. Finally, the Fabula Atellana, which is a type of rustic farce that made use of stock characters and was noted for its slapstick humour. These four strands of native Roman Comedy share several features in common. They portray humorous situations that would have an appeal to a wide audience. The liveliness of the medium and the desire to produce humorous effects generally occur at the expense of the plot.[16] It is not certain how extensively Plautus was influenced by these types of proto-comedy. Two features of his artistic style appear, however, to exhibit some debt to the earlier literary forms. Plautus is often criticized by scholars for a lack of cohesiveness in plot structure. He seems more concerned with the blocking out of the individual scene to extract from it all the laughter possible. Also his comedies are full of lyrical canticae ('arias'), which demonstrate his delight in and preference for music over action.

There is disagreement among ancient sources concerning the number of plays composed by Plautus. At one point as many as 130 plays were ascribed to his authorship. Varro, a scholar belonging to the Ciceronian age, selected 21 plays (that is, 20 complete works and the fragmentary Vidularia) as the only comedies regarded as genuine by the ancient critics. It is generally believed that the plays contained in the badly damaged Ambrosian palimpsest[17] are the same as those in Varro's collection. There is good reason to suppose that Plautus may have written several more comedies that, for whatever reason, have not been preserved. Varro himself attributed other titles to Plautus on stylistic grounds; the exact number is unrecorded. As well the titles of over thirty plays are assigned to him in other ancient citations.[18]

Attempts at establishing a chronology for the writing and the presentation of the plays of Plautus have resulted in confusion and inconsistency. To some scholars (e.g. W.B. Sedgwick, 1925, 55 ff.) the increased proportion of space given over to lyrical passages is used as a basis for the dating of the comedies. To others, such as C.H. Buck and P.J. Enk,[19] references to contemporary figures and events would seem to provide a definite frame of time. But there are obvious difficulties with this method. First, scholars may read allusions to contemporary issues into passages where none are intended by Plautus. Second, a single play can be dated to two contradictory years by reference to two different allusions. J.N. Hough has tried to avoid the pitfall of dating by year in his classification of Plautus' works into an Early, Middle, or Late period of composition.[20] The criteria

that each of these scholars adopt to explain their mode of dating the comedies are all highly subjective, and for this reason are suspect.

Works that can be securely dated fall into the last two decades of Plautus' life. Only two plays have definite dates. Pseudolus is dated at 191 B.C. from a fragment of the didascalia[21] in the Ambrosian palimpsest; and Plautus' Stichus is dated at 200 B.C. from an almost complete didascalia in the same manuscript. References to contemporary people and events given an approximate guideline for the dating of other plays. Miles Gloriosus can be placed near 204 B.C.[22] because it contains an allusion to Naevius' imprisonment (211 ff.); Cistellaria was presented before the end of the Second Punic War from evidence in line 202. Trinummus (990) mentions the new aediles, and therefore cannot be earlier than 194 B.C. Aulularia (498 ff.) assumes the abrogation of the Lex Oppia, which occurred in 195 B.C. Bacchides (1072 ff.) refers to the four triumphs of 189 B.C. Information about Plautus' life and works from ancient authors and the reference to one play in the text of another provide a further source of approximate dating. Truculentus may belong to the period of Plautus' old age, according to Cicero.[23] Bacchides contains a reference to Plautus' Epidicus; this requires that the latter was written earlier. No further details are available about Plautus. Cicero tells us that the playwright died in 184 B.C.[24] The date could simply indicate the last record of the production of a new play. Cicero may be drawing his conclusions about the year of Plautus' death from the absence thereafter of recorded titles.[25]

Notes

1. Aulus Gellius (c. A.D. 136 - c. 180). Noctes Atticae, III.3.14ff. Even the authenticity of the information on Plautus provided by the great Roman scholar Varro (116-27 B.C.) is doubtful in that he tends to form historical portraits on a model derived from the genre of Greek biography. For the pertinent section on Plautus in Jerome (c. A.D. 384 - 420) see his Chronicle on the year 200 B.C.

2. F. Leo, 1912, 63-86.

3. There is some evidence in Plautus' Mercator (I,10): eandem Latine Mercator Macci Titi ['this same (comedy) in Latin in called the Mercator of Maccus Titus'] and in in Asinaria (Prologue, 11): Maccus vortit barbare. favors Maccus ('Maccus translated it into a barbarian tongue', ie. Latin).

4. W. Beare (1964, 47) sees the same as proof that Plautus also acted in mime. But see G.E. Duckworth (1952, 50) who does not agree with this conclusion.

5. Gellis (pecunia ... quam in operis artificum scaenicorum pepererat; 'money ... which he had acquired in the craftsmanship of the stage').

6. See J.W. Duff (1953, 118) and Beare, p. 45, who argue that Plautus' association with the stage had always been as an actor.

7. Gellius: inops Romam redisset et ob quaerendum victum ... operam pistori locasset ('destitute he returned to Rome and in order to feed himself he found work in a mill').

8. Ibid.: Saturionem et Addictum et tertiam quandum, ... in pistrino eum scripsisse ('that he wrote the Saturio and the Addictus and a third one ... while he was employed at the mill').

9. The ancient evidence to support this belief is, however, scanty. The awarding of citizenship is exactly the sort of biographical detail that is often included in accounts of prominent men whose background is otherwise obscure.

10. E.F. Watling (The Pot of Gold) in the preface of his Penguin translation briefly discusses this point.

11. Duckworth, p. 56, is reluctant to confine Plautus' productivity to only the final two decades of his life. He believes that Plautus commenced writing towards the start of the Second Punic War.

12. M. Grant, 1954, 18.

13. Naevius was allegedly the author of the method contaminatio whereby material from one or more Greek New Comedies was 'woven' into the play being 'translated'. The practice was frowned upon by Plautus' contemporaries. Cf. Terence; Andria (Prol., 18), who attempted to refute a similar charge. None of Plautus' plays can be proved the product of contaminatio.

14. For example, information in the prologue of Plautus' plays attribute the original of Asinaria to Demophilus; of Casina and Rudens to Diphilus; of Mercator and Trinummus to Philemon. Bacchides, Cistellaria and Stichus are usually regarded by commentators as reflecting the technique of the most famous of these Greek playwrights, Menander.

15. Duckworth, p. 18, points out that certain of the so-called Italic sources of comedy, notably the Fabula Atellana (discussed below) and the mime, may have been subject to Greek influence prior to 240 B.C.

16. Ibid., p. 16: "Through all these forms ran a fondness for song and dance."

17. The Ambrosian palimpsest is the earliest extant manuscript of Plautus' plays. It is assigned to the fourth or fifth century A.D., and originally contained 21 works. Part of the manuscript was erased in the 7th or 8th century, and was replaced by a portion of the Books of Kings and the Book of Chronicles, Beare, p. 377.

18. Gellius tells us that Saturio and Addictus were written while Plautus was employed in the mill. Terence ascribes Commorientes (Ad., 7) and possibly Colax (Eun., 25) to Plautus. The names of the 21 extant plays are:

Amphitruo (Amphitruo) hereafter cited as:	Amph.
Asinaria (The Comedy of Asses)	Asin.
Aulularia (The Pot of Gold)	Aul.
Bacchides (The Two Bacchises)	Bacc.
Captivi (The Prisoners)	Cap.
Casina (Casina)	Cas.
Cistellaria (The Casket Comedy)	Cist.
Curculio (Curculio)	Cur.
Epidicus (Epidicus)	Epid.
Menaechmi (The Brothers Menaechmus)	Men.
Mercator (The Merchant)	Mer.
Miles Gloriosus (The Braggart Warrior)	Mil.
Mostellaria (The Haunted House)	Mos.
Persa (The Persian Girl)	Per.
Poenulus (The Little Carthaginian)	Poen.

Pseudolus (Pseudolus)	Pseud.
Rudens (The Rope)	Rud.
Stichus (Stichus)	Stich.
Trinummus (A Three-Dollar Day)	Trin.
Truculentus (Truculentus)	Truc.
Vidularia (The Travelling Bag)	Vid.

19. I have been unable to consult directly the Phd dissertation of C.H. Buck, John Hopkins University, 1940, entitled A Chronology of the Plays of Plautus. Duckworth, p. 55, indicates that Buck dates Menaechmi to 186 B.C. because of the inclusion of the name Scipio (Men., 196). See also his review of Buck's thesis is AJP 64 (1943), 350. P.J. Enk dates Menaechmi to 215 B.C. because of Plautus' inclusion of the name Hiero who was king of Syracuse (Men., 412). I am also indebted to Duckworth for this information.

20. In AJP, 60 (1939), 422-435, J.N. Hough demonstrates one of the various criteria he employs to divide the plays into his periods of composition. His theory, based on the frequency of intrigue and of explanations given to aid the audience's comprehension of this, suggests that Plautus, in his later plays, minimized the expository aid and allowed the audience to perceive the trickery for themselves. Hough does admit the possibility that later productions of the plays might have affected the amount of explanation present in them, but he denies that this poses any serious threat to the validity of his argument. But it must be remembered that Hough's method is basically stylistic in that he places plays in the late period because they exhibit a more refined technique. This assumes that Plautus' plays were better written the older he got, and that the exposition of material was an area in which this refinement was obvious. It must be noted that only two of the plays are datable, and these to the last two decades of his career.

21. The didascalia contain the official details, including the consuls of the particular year and the circumstances of the first performance, and were affixed to the text.

22. The Oxford Classical Dictionary[2] (1970, 843) cites 204 B.C. as does G. Norwood (1932, 16). But Duckworth, p. 54, chooses 205 B.C.; Duff, p. 118, prefers 206 B.C.

23. Cicero, De Senectute, XIV.50.

24. Ibid., Brutus, XV.60: Plautus P. Claudio, L. Porcio ... Consulibus mortuus est, Catone censore ('Plautus died when P. Claudius and L. Porcius were consuls and Cato was censor').

25. Beare, p. 48.

Chapter Two

Roman Religion and Plautus: An Introduction

During the earliest generations of the aristocratic Republic (509 - 31 B.C.) at Rome the nature of religion was primarily characterizied by a popular belief in animism. Indeed, the existence of spirits or powers that exert a special influence upon the human environment was a prevailing concept throughout Italy. Even private activity was influenced by the desire of the primitive Italic peoples to remain in a proper relationship with the invisible natural forces. The Romans called these spirits numina. No attempt was made, however, to establish clearer guidelines about the identities of the numina. In some instances it is possible to associate a particular numina with its residence in an actual spot or geographical locale; in others, a spirit may be identified with a specific function or occupation of human life. But, in general, the Romans themselves often appear uncertain whether their prayers address a male or female spirit.[1] It is significant that the numina never became so individualized in this early period that they acquired anthropomorphic personalities. Later, the numina received names in an adjectival form to denote their function. This tended to make them approach a more definite personality. As Roman religious practice and belief gradually evolved, the amalgamation of different, foreign elements caused the numina to acquire anthropomorphic personalities.[2]

It is generally believed that an animistic Roman religion develops to serve the practical needs of an agrarian economy. The numina of such a society are looked upon as companions who oversee the daily tasks of the agricultural family and who ensure the prosperity of the farm. The focus of Roman religious activity is upon the family unit. The paterfamilias ('the head of the family') is charged with the performance of various rituals that seek to relieve fears concerning the well-being of the group.[3] Each member of the family is permitted to take part in the regular services and in the special invocations that are offered at moments of birth, death and marriage.

As the agricultural community gradually developed into a larger and more complicated urban design, the state assumed as a public function the responsibility of propitiating the numina. The organization and fulfilment of this public task is what is meant by the term religio ('religion').[4] State religion at Rome systematized and regulated worship through the establishment of permanent priesthoods to conduct the rites. The chief effect of such a rigid structuring by the State was that the indivdiual lost a sense of his immediate contact with and domination by the numina. This deadening of man's active, daily communication with the spiritual realm also led to a consequent lapse in a sense of religious duty. Therefore, in times of economic or political stress when the State religion failed to satisfy the private needs of its citizens, many of them turned for emotional support to foreign religions and Eastern mystery cults.

It is possible to trace foreign influence upon the native Roman religion back to two principal sources: Etruria and Greece. The

Etruscans introduced a new triad of gods named Tinia, Uni and Menvra, who were adopted by the Romans under the titles of Iuppiter, Iuno and Minerva. This borrowing begins a shift from vague numina to anthropomorphic divinities. In addition, the Romans incorporated into their routine the practice of housing a deity in a temple and furnishing his residence with an appropriate cult-statue.[5] Augury is also regarded by some historians as showing the effect of Etruscan religious usage upon the Romans.[6]

Greek religious ideology and its system of gods, however, made the greater impact upon the Roman world. The Romans came into contact with these ideas at first indirectly through Etruria and Latium. Extensive colonization by the Western Greeks in southern Italy brought native religion into direct touch with a new body of divinities and their mythology. The Romans were eclectic, choosing to adopt some Greek gods, while transferring the traits of others to their own native deities.[7] Roman observance was significantly altered by two particular Greek religious ceremonies: the Lectisternium and the Supplicatio. The Lectisternium is a Greek ritual in which the images of the gods are exhibited on couches in front of tables that are laden with food and drink. People worship these images in the hope that, if their offerings are acceptable, the gods will foster their needs. The incorporation of this practice by the Romans meant that they no longer propitiated indigenous numina, but rather the human likeness of Greek gods. Supplicatio refers to a Greek rite in which throngs of people, adorned with garlands, go in procession around city temples and prostrate themselves as a sign of their reverence. In the borrowing of

this ritual, Romans were freed for the first time to give public expression to the pent-up religious feelings that had long been restrained by the more conventional tradition of the Roman state. A desire to give expression to an emotional religion was especially visible near the end of the Second Punic War (218 - 201 B.C.). Roman religion had become such a varied collection[8] of beliefs and practices that during the initial military success achieved by the famous Carthaginian leader, Hannibal, in north Italy, it could not through its state ceremonies control or lessen the fears of the city dwellers. Therefore in obedience to the Sibylline books which stated that Hannibal would leave Italy if the 'Great Mother' were brought to Rome, the first oriental mystery cult and cult stone, that of the prestigious Magna Mater was transferred from Phrygia to Rome in 204 B.C. The vitality of the primitive Roman animistic belief was restricted to the peasant population of the Italic countryside.

It is important to recognize that the genre of Roman Comedy is also religious in background. Both at Greece and at Rome dramatic performances of tragedy and comedy were not only forms of public entertainment but also acts connected with public worship. In Greece tragedy and comedy originated as ritual praise of the popular god, Dionysus. Dramatic contests took place at his festivals within his holy precinct. In the province of Attica there were three Dionysiac festivals specifically devoted to dramatic presentations held at points from mid-winter to spring. The lesser or Rural Dionysia took place in December and early January. Aristophanes (Acharnians, 247 ff.) describes the playful and easy gaiety of the public processions that

exhibit the peasants' awe of Dionysus' sexual influence over mankind. The Lenaea occurred in January and at the beginning of February. Performances were initially held in the shrine of Dionysus Lenaeus and then transferred to the permanent theatre in the precinct of Dionysus Eleuthereus[9] on the Acropolis. The Lenaea was under the direction of the archon basileus[10] (the successor of the kings as the supreme religious official at Athens). Although little is known about the exact nature of the rites, it seems that comedy, at first improvised and later acquiring a valid literary form, had more prestige at this festival than tragedy in the early liturgy of the polis.[11] The most prominent sacred holiday was that of the greater or City Dionysia, which was celebrated for five days in late March and early April also in the sacred precinct of Dionysus Eleuthereus. A figure of the god was carried into the theatre by torchlight on the first day of the festival to accompaniment of a religious following.[12] This ceremony culminated in the sacrifice of an animal upon a permanent altar placed in the centre of the orchestra. Dionysus himself was thought to be a spectactor of the dramas composed to celebrate his divinity because of the presence of his cult-statue in the theatre.

At Rome dramatic presentations were also directly related to formal religious occasions. The earliest of these were put on as a means of discharging rites of expiation or thanksgiving in periods of trouble. For example, the first performance of drama (the precise type is unclear) took place at Rome at the Ludi Romani in 240 B.C. to solemize the Roman victory in the First Punic War (264 - 241 B.C.).

Roman Comedy, a genre heavily indebted to the literary techniques and styles of Greek New Comedy, was presented both on religious and secular occasions. The religious setting of Roman Comedy originates from the influence of its Greek heritage and from that of its own ancient roots.[13] Rustic comedy had always played a significant role in sacred ceremonies, such as weddings and funerals, during which sacrifices and gifts of prayer were made by those present. The formal State religious presentations of Comedy were at the Ludi Romani held in September in honour of Iuppiter; the Ludi Plebeii ('the Plebian Games') held in November for the same god; the Ludi Apollinaris ('the Games of Apollo') held in July and the Ludi Megalenses ('the Games in honour of Cybele, the Magna Mater') held in April.[14] It is noteworthy that even the presentation of Comedy at secular events could have a religious undercurrent to it. For example, comedies seemed to have been a part of the Ludi Votivi ('the Games of Offering'), held for the inauguration of some public building or upon the occasion of a military triumph; and they were also a prominent feature of the Ludi Funebres ('Funeral Games'), put on to commemorate the death of a Roman nobleman. The presentation of these performances on solemn occasions indicates that they may possess a sacred element. During the time of Plautus comedies were played near the temple of the god in whose recognition and honour the festival was held.[15] There was always an altar present as part of the stage equipment; sometimes a temple was represented on stage as well.[16]

Plautine comedy is particularly full of material that reveals the interest of the playwright in religious experience and in the activi-

ties that demonstrate a human desire to communicate with and to be protected by a supernatural realm. The paraphernalia of omens and augury, and dreams enter most of the plays. Often they provide the turning point in a character's outlook or in the unfolding and the direction of a scene or plot. Yet, most of the scholarship that exists on Plautus and his works is concerned with such matters as his literary style, metrical innovativeness and with a chronology of his plays.[17] Examinations of the religious nature or sub-structure of the comedies have been cursory at best. There have been attempts to determine whether instances of religious activity in a play are intended to convey a Roman spirit or usage, or whether, in fact, they are derived from Greek religion.[18] The information that is produced from such investigations is useful and important, but it does not get below the superficial appearance of religious experience in the art. There is even some inclination to regard Plautus' use of religious apparatus or moral attitudes as actually based upon his borrowing of models from the genre of Greek New Comedy.[19] This view reduces the significance of religion in Plautus' comedies to the status of simple translation into Latin of foreign originals. It is, in my opinion, an incorrect and misleading approach.

Plautus lived and composed his plays during an era of great change in the Roman world. New ideas were infiltrating every area of Roman life, and especially of Roman religion. The resulting confusion generated by the rapid influx into Italy of foreign religious attitudes and strange habits of worship caused some skepticism about the existence of divinities themselves. The State cult at Rome had so dis-

associated the ordinary citizen from any personal contact with his gods that his religious faith was gradually becoming more an act of observance at periods during the year than a daily expression of belief. This disassociation from a personal faith caused some people to lay aside former beliefs and practices. For others it produced an almost fanatical movement to preserve and foster the Mos Maiorum ('the ancient and time-honoured customs of Roman national tradition').

One contemporary scholar, H. Tolliver, has taken an extreme position on the reasons for the current of skepticism that runs through Plautus' generation.[20] She argues that Plautus himself is largely responsible for the influence of this trend upon Roman society. Various examples of an irreligious behaviour on the part of characters or of remarks that are supposedly damaging to the credibility of religious belief and ritual are extracted from the plays as proof of Plautus' own rejection of religious experience and its value. She advances the theory so far as to suggest that the deterioration of the State cult and, therefore, of the political unity of the Republic is directly attributable to the influence of Plautine comedy. A few critics have opposed this interpretation by arguing that the majority of the irreverent or disparaging remarks about the gods are made by characters in the plays who are obviously foreigners or Romans of low social rank.[21] Furthermore, the punishment that is usually meted out for the transgression of these characters would appear to controvert Tolliver's position. These arguments in opposition to Tolliver are convincing indications that more study must be directed towards an understanding of Plautus' approach to religion and to the purpose of

its incorporation into his plays.[22]

It is incorrect, in my opinion, to disregard the moral undercurrent of Plautus' works. The playwright's reputation as a first-rate producer of hilarious situational comedy should not be allowed to control our perception of his subtle use of humour to introduce and to inspect, in a lighthearted way, important issues in human life.[23] The plays of Plautus do reflect the mixed nature of Roman religion during the second century. They portray a belief no longer in agreement with the animistic approach taken to the powers of numina by a simpler agrarian society. The cosmopolitan lifestyle enjoyed by private citizens in an urban environment affects religious expression in Plautus. His plays do exhibit the more contemporary amalgamation of Etruscan, Greek and oriental beliefs and practices with native Roman religion. It is accurate to say that skepticism appears during this period, but Plautus is not responsible for its promulgation. One must remember that Rome was receiving much of its foreign religious influence at a time when the Greeks themselves, wearied by centuries of war, had lost confidence in the power of religious belief and ceremony to alter the conditions of their existence in a favorable way. From the fourth century onward Greek literature manifests this sense in man of the gods' failure to provide meaning and to answer real problems in life.

Plautus' comedies show the sensitive response of their author to these human issues and inner religious conflict. It is the purpose of this thesis to demonstrate that Plautus holds up Roman religion, changed as it is, as an anchor for Roman mankind in a turbulent and

politically divisive historical period. He connects Roman religion with a clear set of moral standards that are made public in the plays. By attending rigidly to a code of behaviour and religious habit, sanctioned by their traditional ways, the Roman audience is shown that they can regain a sense of control over their daily existence. Religious practice is, for Plautus, the means by which man acknowledges his belief in the concern of the gods and his dependence upon them for the benefits that give human life some of its dignity.

My discussion of the nature of Roman religion in Plautus' plays is divided into three general classifications: specific religious ritual or ceremony; the significance of such religious phenomena as omens, augury and dreams, as well as an examination of the various interpreters of omens; and finally, there is a rebuttal of the charge of impiety laid against the poet by Tolliver and Segal. It is intended to show that Plautus' desire to support a belief in the gods and to strengthen the moral sense of his audience may be demonstrated through an examination of the portrait of Iuppiter in Amphitruo and of the ethical values, pietas and fides, that are given a prominent place in many of the comedies.

Notes

1. C. Bailey, 1932, 36. The formula si deus, si dea ('whether god or goddess') is used as a safeguard to ward off the anger of an offended deity, or as a sign of human ignorance of the truth.

2. Ibid., p. 35-36. Bailey notes that the Romans furnish probably the fullest and best example of an animistic religion.

3. J.E. Sandys (1963, 151) argues that human anxiety arose from the very undefined nature of the numina. Hence, the rituals were propitiatory in nature. No worshipper could be secure that his wishes would fall within the powers of a particular numen to fulfil.

4. Religio originally signified the awe or fear felt in the presence of the supernatural which prompted man to worship, then assumed the further meaning of the cult-acts which are the physical expression of worship.

5. H.H. Scullard (1975, 398) points out that the cult-statues of native gods were few in number before the Second Punic War (218 - 201 B.C.).

6. Augury consists in the interpretation of divine will through an observation of the flight of birds or through other signs and omens perceived in their behaviour.

7. For a full discussion of the Greek gods who were taken into Roman belief see: H.J. Rose, 1948, 90-98; Sandys, p. 155-156 and Scullard, p. 398-399.

8. The comedies of Plautus betray the mixed nature of Roman religion. He combines Etruscan divination with members of the Olympian pantheon and ancient Roman deities, such as Lar Familiaris ('the Spirit of the Household') without any apparent sense of incongruity.

9. The title means Dionysus of Eleutherai, a part of Greece that bordered on Attica and Boeotia.

10. A. Pickard-Cambridge (1968, 58) believes that the City Dionysia must have been a relatively late institution because it was controlled by the eponymous archon rather than by the archon basileus.

11. Oxford Classical Dictionary^2, 1970, 594.

12. Ibid., p. 350.

13. But Rose, p. 96, believes that the offering of comedies on sacred occasions is entirely the product of Greek influence.

14. Plautus' Pseudolus was performed at the Ludi Megalenses for the dedication of the goddess' temple in 191 B.C. There is evidence in the didascalia to Stichus (Beare, 163) that places it in 200 B.C. at the Ludi Plebii.

15. The theatre was a temporary wooden structure that could be quickly set up and dismantled. There was no permanent theater in Rome until 55 B.C. when a stone edifice was built at Pompey's expense in order to furbish his public image. It seems that the Romans conceived of the gods as being present in the theatre during performances. Lucretius, De Rerum Natura, IV. 75-80 gives us some evidence of a Roman custom of seating the gods in the theatre to view the spectacle.

16. For an example of a representation of a temple on stage, see Plautus' Rudens. The dramatic performances at Rome opened with a sacrifice on an altar. Lucretius (II. 416-17) attests to the altar's positioning near or on the stage. This evidence leads Taylor (1952, 151) to suggest that the altar in Mosterllaria was more than just a stage property, but was, in fact, the sacrifical altar used in the rites that preceded the play.

17. For example, S. Oliphant (1911, 165-173) has tried to argue the importance of specific types of omens and auguries as one of Plautus' devices to sustain a humorous approach to his subject-matter. The article produces much interesting information, but its conclusions are not fully demonstrated. He pays little attention to the serious import that is often below a humorous surface.

18. Cf. G. Gulick, 1896, 235-247.

19. Pierre Grimal (1975, 485-498) feels that many of the moral attitudes that are expressed in the comedies of Plautus are derived from Greek New Comedy. He tries to show that the lenient attitude portrayed toward young men in love with courtesans (Trinummus) comes from Greek New Comedy. In Epidicus Plautus seems to defend a young man who has abandoned his shield on the field of battle. Grimal suggests that this attitude was a theme in Athenian satire, which was drawn upon by the writers of Greek comedy, one of whom furnished the model of Plautus' play. He also suggests that the censure of bad morals, that appears in Plautus' comedies, was also borrowed from Greek literature. He points out that the condemnation of the decline in morality, before it became a Roman theme, had been the great preoccupation of Athens prior to Alexander. Such condemnation would be more likely to occur in Athens than in Rome, which was a prosperous ruler of the world after the defeat of Hannibal.

Grimal argues that the theme of luxus ('luxury') was posed only at the end of Plautus' career. His argument is unconvincing because the foreign conquests and contacts with the east which fostered luxury in Rome began in the first Punic war. The war-time measure of 215 B.C. (Lex Oppia) to limit the amount of silver plate and jewelry used by individuals, provides evidence that by this time the extravagance of some Romans had become a problem. While it is true that luxury had become a more serious issue by the end of Plautus' career, it is misleading to say that it did not exist previously.

20. H. Tolliver, 1951, 49-57. See also her abstract (1949, 435) and the discussion of Segal, 1968, 1-7.

21. J.P. Cèbe, 1963, 174-177; M.R. Schilling, 1975, 342-353; G. Leffingwell, 1968, 113-127.

22. There are two particular studies that show how preliminary the work is in this area of Plautus' original contribution to Roman Comedy. P.R. Coleman-Norton (1936, 320-337) treats a few of the passages that pertain to the gods or to the notion of a human soul in order to discern how extensive was the influence of Greek philosophy (most notably the Epicurean and Stoic concepts) upon Roman religious thought. J. Hanson (1959, 48-101) provides a great deal of useful material on Plautus' verbalization of religious concepts and on the attributes that are commonly assigned to the gods by the playwright. For example, lists of citations are provided by Hanson to show how characters express their fear or love of the gods and how such feelings are cast into various prayer formulae. Both studies are helpful, but rather as a starting point or as a 'source book' for further discussion.

23. G.E. Duckworth (1952, 295-304) brings up the matter of ethical import in Plautus' comedies, but he examines only a limited number of passages. The importance of religion in Plautus was firsted noted by Paul Lejay (1925, 177). "Quand on veut définir l'esprit du théâtre de Plaute, il faut tout d'abord considérer la religion ... Elle est un des éléments de fond par lesquels il réspondait à l'attente des spectateurs et avec des sujects grecs, retenait et satisfaisait un public romain"

Chapter Three

Religious Observance

Ennius, a revered patriot and literary contemporary of Plautus, is once supposed to have remarked:

> Ego deum genus esse semper dixi et dicam caelitum; sed eos non curare opinor quid agat humanum genus.
>
> ('I have always maintained, and always will, that the race of gods, the heavenly beings, exists; but I do not think that they bother about what mankind does.')[1]

The flippant way in which Ennius assigns divinity its place in the order of things betrays something of the cynicism present among his own sophisticated and aristocratic associates. The sentiment does not, however, contradict the atmosphere of fear that modern Roman historians observe as the defining characteristic of religious expression during this generation.[2] The ancient historian, Livy (c. 59 B.C. - 17 A.D.) mentions the offering of human sacrifices in this period, an act which suggests the erosion, in Roman society, of the beneficial and self-respecting claims of State religion.[3] Part of the confusion and hopelessness about the nature of religion and the relevance of ceremonial observance comes, as have been previously discussed, from the rapid infiltration of foreign beliefs and practice into the Roman world of the third century B.C. The State cult simply could not absorb or systematize in any meaningful way the many new divinities and sacred

rituals of Greece and the East. The adaptation of Hellenistic gods and their mythological backgrounds by the Romans was more easily made in their literary pursuits than in their religious experience. While it suited an artistic expression of Roman national pride to be linked with the famous exploits of the Trojan War, a clash was inevitable between the Roman morality contained in such vitures as pietas (a self-sacrificing devotion to the proprieties of family, State and religion)[4] and the less inhibiting mores inculcated by the religious outlook of other peoples.

Another cause of religious turmoil is found in the decades of social, political and military upheaval that resulted in the emergence of Rome as a world leader in Plautus' day. The playwright's audience was clearly divided into two social groups, those of the patrician and of the plebeian class. The economic status as well as the personal and social privileges that pertained to members of both groups had been the subject of endless class conflict throughout the centuries following the institution of the Roman Republic in 509 B.C. Although the ordinary citizen in Rome might have gained a better lifestyle from these struggles in the distant past, he remembered the disadvantages that underlay his good fortune. Many of the plots and characters of Plautus' comedies reflect the problems that afflict individuals who suffer from financial inequity, from an insufficient food supply, or from the loss of freedom or from their fear of such. The prominence of the slave class in Plautus' plays and the care with which he draws the cunning superiority of the slave in contrast to the figure of the master give some indication of the special interest Romans paid to this

as part of their daily reality.[5] The same may be true of the stock figures of the parasite or the glutton. Plautus rarely loses an opportunity to put into their speeches tantalizing accounts, real or wishful, of banquets consumed or plotted for another day.[6] The fact that most of the issues that divided the plebeian class from the nobles were resolved without bloodshed shows the resilience of the Roman spirit. Similarly the lies and the tricks that strain relationships between slaves and their owners or between sons and their parents in Roman Comedy are also generally answered to the requirement of all parties. But the anxiety produced by long periods of social inequality and by personal hardship is an indication of the inability of Roman religion to unite its worshippers and to be responsive to their needs.

During Plautus' own time the first two Punic Wars (264-241; 218-201 B.C.) are perhaps the most important source for the change in Romans from religious faith to fear. As Rome had expanded her political and military influence throughout the peninsula the treaties of alliance that were completed with other Italic tribes, such as the Etruscans, the Sabines and the Aequi, normally added to her self-assurance. Only infrequently did she experience a major military disaster such as happened to the Roman army trapped and forced to surrender to the Samites at the Caudine Forks in 321 B.C. The necessity of protecting and expanding her commercial interests in the face of Carthaginian dominance in the Western Mediterranean tested not only Roman political nerve but also the effectiveness of her religious belief and usage. The audiences of Plautus could not forget their sense of panic and despair when Rome was defeated in three successive

battles against the strength of Hannibal at Trebia (218), Trasimene (217) and especially at Cannae (216). The slaughter of two entire Roman legions at Cannae, the handing over of many towns in Central and Southern Italy to the enemy at Trasimene and the destruction of newly-built fleets by the Carthaginian naval power off Southern Italy in the previous Punic War led to a skepticism about the benefits of religion. It is ironic that at the very moment when terror that Rome might be deprived of her prosperity and freedom swept over the Roman people the State cult tried to appease the fear through an elaborate, and superficial, public veneration of Hellenistic gods.[7]

It is significant, therefore, that Plautus portrays on the Roman stage many instances of religious ritual and customs. The procedures that govern the characters in their performance of sacred rites are carefully outlined and faithfully executed. Religious observance or activity may be defined by three general areas: sacrificial offerings; participation in the celebration of religious festivals; and in the visitation of gods at their temples. The attitude that the characters of Plautus reveal as they initiate and participate in devotional activities is regularly positive. They seem to believe in the usefulness of frequent attendance upon divine powers; such a religious behaviour acknowledges publicly the Roman citizen's approval and his sense of the value of supernatural blessings in human life. It further suggests that in Plautus' opinion, the cultivation of ritual habits assists mankind in coping with the pressures of urban society and with the problems and the insecurity that often resulted from Rome's pursuit of international power.

I

Sacrifice

Sacrifice, which means making an object 'holy' (sacer) by offering it to god, is the chief means that characters in Plautus choose to communicate with the gods and to appeal for their assistance and favour. There is one species of sacrifice commonly found in the plays, that of the tributary or honorific sacrifice.[8] In essence, the rite expresses man's respect for a god and also his request or gratitude for a particular service. The staging of sacrifices or references to their performance occur in eleven of Plautus' comedies. They are found most frequently in three particular works: Epidicus (four times); Stichus (four times); and in Poenulus (three times). All types of individuals become involved in tributary sacrifice, including the elderly (e.g. Periphanes in Epidicus), a courtesan (Truculentus), two married women (Stichus) and a leno (Poenulus).[9] A wide variety of deities are mentioned as the recipients of sacrificial offerings. There are offerings to members of the Olympian dynasty, such as Iuppiter (Mostellaria), Apollo (Mercator), Venus (Poenulus) and Pluto (Epidicus); lesser deities, generally of a more Roman character, are also honoured. For example, sacrifices are made to the Lar Familiaris in Aululariа; the Genius ('the tutelary spirit resident in every man') in Captivi; and Iuno Lucina ('Iuno, the one who makes children see the light of day') in Truculentus.

The Greek philosopher, Theophrastus (c. 370-288/5 B.C.), distinguishes three separate categories of tributary or honorific sacrifice. There are offerings in order to supplicate or to petition a god for a

particular benefit; offerings to express thankgiving for having obtained some favour; and offerings in general praise of the deities.[10] In Plautine comedy the nature of tributary sacrifice is directly related to the requirements of plot structure and to its unfolding. Only the first two categories in Theophrastus' definition of the tributary sacrifice occur in Plautus. Expression of praise to a god are regularly found in the rituals of supplication and thanksgiving, but they are never disassociated from the immediate and practical objective of the worshipper. Plautus' characters always respond in praise of a specific good act or gift that is provided by a god.[11] It is important to note that the failure of Plautus to include sacrifices that glorify a universal concept of godhood is not because the playwright disagreed with such a religious practice. Similarly, the lack of examples in the plays of piacular and sacramental sacrifices indicates the limitations imposed upon composition because a character must act within the demands of his role in the plot. Dramatic activity in Plautus focuses upon the private life of the characters, their love-affairs, stratagems and casual triumphs. Hence, the type of sacrifice that individuals are portrayed as offering is not connected with rituals of a more civic nature, as those characterized by the piacular and the sacramental sacrifice.

Supplicatory sacrifice is offered for a number of private reasons, but in the Aulularia Plautus refers twice to the special blessings of god that are invoked during the more formal ceremony of a wedding.[12] Euclio petitions his Lar Familiaris in preparation for the marriage of his daughter (Aul., II, 387); the bridegroom, Megadorus, also acknow-

ledges the solemnity of the occasion by sacrificing to an unnamed divinity (Aul., III, 579).[13]

There are many examples in the plays of how even an ordinary moment or humorous incident can take on a realistic and human touch because of the use of supplication. In Mercator (III, 678-680) the matron, Dorippa, enters the stage as she returns from her country estate. When she happens upon her neighbor Demipho's altar (presumably erected in front of his house), Dorippa suddenly decides to offer a personal prayer. Thus the audience takes part in her supplication as she presents a laurel branch to Apollo. In a brief and unpretentious way Dorippa reinforces, for the viewer, the significance of prayer. It is her means of ensuring confidence that her family will continue to flourish and to receive divine indulgence:

> Apollo, quaeso te ut des pacem propitius, salutem et sanitatem nostrae familiae, meoque ut parcas gnato pace propitius.
>
> (Apollo, I beseech thee, more graciously grant thy favour, and safety and sound health to our family, and spare my son with more gracious favour.)

Similarly, in Amphitruo, Alcmena entreats the gods to assist her during the pangs of delivery. The slave, Bromia (Amph., V, 1092-93), seemingly reminds the audience of the continuing acceptability of this ancient practice as she recalls:

> ... ut solent puerperae, invocat deos immortalis ...
>
> (... she called upon the immortal gods, as women in labour are wont to do ...)

Sometimes Plautus places supplicatory sacrifice in a humorous setting. In Trinummus (I, 40-42) the elderly paterfamilias, Callicles, bids his wife to petition their Lar Familiaris for the customary benefits. He adds in a whispered aside:

> teque ut quam primum possim videam emortuam.
> (also speed the day when I see you dead and buried.)[14]

The remark does not mean to show disrespect for the god, but rather it calls the viewer's attention to the easy familiarity between Callicles and his resident guardian. The momentary antagonism that can exist between a husband and a wife is a commonplace in comedy of all periods. Plautus depends on the audience's awareness of the intimate position of the Lar in the daily running of the Roman household. Callicles cleverly inserts a fleeting and wishful outburst of anger into the frame of his wife's sacred mission. Only the audience and the Lar witness the remark. Hence Plautus furnishes us with a glimpse of the domestic squabbles over which the Lar presides and Callicles' lack of fear in enlisting the god's 'help'.

Again in Captivi (II, 290-292) Philocrates, a wealthy youth taken prisoner along with his slave, has switched identities with Tyndarus in order to effect his own release, while speaking in this disguise to the elderly captor, Hegio, Philocrates comments upon the stinginess of his own father:

> Genio suo ubi quando sacruficat, ad rem divinam quibus est opu', Samiis vasis utitur, ne ipse Genius surrupiat:

(Whenever he offers sacrifice to his own Genius, he won't use any dishes needed in the service except Samian ones, lest the Genius make off with them:)

Offerings in petition to the Genius, who is the personal guardian of a man's generative powers,[15] is regarded by Philocrates as a normal practice. His description suggests, however, that the god is worthy of much more reverence than his father is willing to show. Although there is nothing unconventional in an aging man entreating a god to extend his sexual vitality, the double reversal of roles in the scene by Philocrates strengthens the force of his reproach in the audience's consideration. We perceive the youthful Philocrates in the extraordinary position of a son seriously chiding an absent father on the finer points of ritual observance. Also, in his role as a 'slave', Philocrates is seen objecting to his 'master's' failure to credit the god with any shred of honesty in the fulfilment of his sacred obligations. Furthermore, the young man's complaint is cast almost as a form of instruction to the aged captor, Hegio, on the maintenance of a proper religious attitude. Hence the audience cannot miss the point: Philocrates' father, by his miserliness, is cheapening the dignity of a traditional ritual that sustains the hope of male fertility in old age.

Sacrifices of thanksgiving are found in a variety of situations in Plautus' comedies. When someone returns home from a journey, it is customary for him or for a family member to express gratitude for the safe passage.[16] For example, in Stichus (II, 396) as soon as Panegyris hears of the homecoming of her husband Pamphilippus, she hastens to order a servant to prepare the materials required for a

household ceremony. In a similar way the traveller quickly discharges his own deeply felt thanks to the gods. Even before he tastes food or has washed away the dirt of the journey, Pamphilippus tells his brother (Stich., IV, 534)

> deos salutatum atque uxorem modo intro devortor domum,
>
> (I'll just pop into my house and pay homage to the gods as well as to my wife,)

Upon learning that his wife is presently at the home of his brother, Pamphilippus still insists on offering the sacrifice. The notion that nothing must be allowed to deter a person from expressing formal thanksgiving immediately upon safe arrival home is also found in Amphitruo (I, 180-181). Sosia, the slave of Amphitruo, indicates that even members of low class Roman life were trained in religious duties and expected to fulfill them:

> Sum vero verna verbero: num numero mihi in mentem fuit dis advenientem gratias pro meritis agere atque adloqui?
>
> (I'm really a scoundrel of a house-born slave! I wasn't very smart, was I? I never thought to address the gods and give them due thanks upon my arrival!)

Sosia and Amphitruo have just returned home from the war, and the slave has been sent out to tell Alcmena of his master's homecoming. While Sosia has clearly been too preoccupied in this scene with his fear of the dark and of the dangers that might befall him, nevertheless he shows the audience how conscious he is of having erred against an important religious custom of the household.

Plautus develops the theme of sacrifice offered in thanksgiving in contexts in which the element of trickery might seem, at first, to demean the value of the religious action itself. In Epidicus (III, 414-416) the well-respected and socially prominent Periphanes[17] organizes a sacrifice in honour of his son's safe return from Thebes. A clever and self-seeking slave uses the occasion as a means of luring a music girl into the house to participate in the ritual. Although she has been purchased by Periphanes for himself, Epidicus knows how interested the son is in her. Periphanes is forewarned of the trick by Apoecides. In Plautine comedy slaves commonly manipulate any device, even a solemn occasion such as formal thanksgiving, to achieve their own immediate and often selfish ends. It must be noted that the gentlemanly Apoecides goes along with the deceit for exactly the same excuse: it will allow him an opportunity to prevent Periphanes' son from buying the music girl. Thus the audience sees the sacrifice distorted to serve the interests of men who are of very different social backgrounds. The placement of the ritual in a type of contest of wits does not reduce the sacred meaning of the ritual act. It is rather the human beings, slave and gentleman alike, who are clearly guilty of unbefitting behaviour. Interestingly, the music girl is not suspicious about the reason for the sacrifice and expresses her happiness at being invited to attend the service. She exhibits by the eagerness of her response that she, like Sosia in Amphitruo, believes in this traditional religious custom.

In Truculentus (II, 476) the courtesan, Phronesium, begins to sacrifice in honour of Iuno Lucina[18] in order to deceive a soldier

into believing that she has borne his child:

> date mi huc stactam atque ignem in aram, ut venerem Lucinam meam.
>
> (give me myrrh-oil and lay a fire on the altar, so that I may pay homage to my Lucina.)

Phronesium is confident that the performance of ritual thanksgiving will give sufficient proof to the man that a baby exists. Notice the emphasis that she places upon the possessive adjective meam ('my Lucina'), as if suggesting that Iuno's fostering care during delivery is a sign of her unique relationship with the goddess. Phronesium's misuse of the sacred rite would strike the audience as a device befitting the tactics of a courtesan. Indeed, the supposed credibility of the trick is her only ploy; it is not the ceremony in the passage that is false, but rather the lady.

Elsewhere, in Epidicus (II, 174-176) Plautus incorporates into the sacrifice of thanksgiving an element of honorific praise or perhaps even of supplication. The early scene is dramatically staged. A sacrifice in honour of the chthonic deities is being made at the graveside of the dead. During ceremonies of this type petitions are normally offered for the good care of dead relatives;[19] sometimes requests are made for a particular benefit to be given to the sacrificer. There is a humorous effect achieved in staging Epidicus at the grave when Apoecides blurts out his notion of why Periphanes has visited his wife's tomb:

> sacruficas
> ilico Orco hostiis, ...
> quia licitumst eam tibi vivendo vincere.

(you offer victims to Pluto on the spot, ... for having been allowed to get the better of her, in the length of days.)

Periphanes has not come to sacrifice for his wife's advantage in the Underworld, nor to petition openly for some gift from the chthonic deities. Apoecides is amused that his friend has turned the ceremony into a means of repaying a debt of gratitude owed to Pluto for letting him outlive his wife. The humour in this reversal of religious practice is balanced, if not also corrected, by the expression licitumst. Periphanes clearly has not worked a trick either through the ceremony or through the fact that he has survived his wife. It is the god, Pluto, who has permitted additional life to Periphanes. Hence, the audience may recognize that behind the quite human expression of fear of death Plautus reveals a basic connection, for the Roman world, between the gods and the duration of a man's life.

II

The Implements of Sacrifice

In Plautus' works particular attention is paid by the sacrificer to the use of appropriate objects or animals during the ceremony. For example, in Poenulus (I, 253-254) Adelpasium and her sister want to honour Venus through a sacrifice on her festal day, known as Aphrodisia. The young woman is especially concerned that everything that pertains to the proper handling of the ritual has been gathered because only then will she be confident of receiving divine favour.

Blood offerings of animals are an essential feature in certain sacrifices. The ritual of thanksgiving[20] is regularly associated in

Plautus with gifts of blood to the deities. In Captivi (IV, 862ff) the parasite, Ergasilus, suggests that Hegio should have a lamb brought in for sacrifice to display his gratitude for his son's escape from the status of being a captive slave in a foreign city. The ritual befits the joyousness of the scene. Yet Ergasilus does not attempt to conceal that his concern arises just as much from the juicy size of the lamb as from the importance of the occasion:

> sed iube ...
> agnum adferri proprium pinguem.
>
> (but order a lamb to brought in, a right plump one.)

Plautus here manages to combine the sacred tradition of the selection of an animal of high quality[21] with the good fun of inspecting the victim through the eyes of a true 'connoisseur'.

The quantity of animals presented for sacrifice seems to be of some concern to Plautus' characters, but the precise number is usually unclear. In Aulularia only one animal is killed during the ceremony of marriage. In Stichus (I, 251) the parasite, Gelasimus, may be showing the same self-interest as his counterpart Ergasilus, when he inquires:

> quot agnis fecerat?
>
> (how many lambs did she [Panegyris] offer up?)

The audience would know that those involved in blood sacrifices consume part of the roasted victim. In Poenulus (II, 453) a definite number of lambs is provided. The specification of six lambs, however, does not seem to indicate a greater solemnity in the occasion. Lycus, a leno,

refers to their quantity simply as a means of complaining that his requests were not answered by favourable omens, whereas his prostitutes gained Venus' good will with their very first offerings (IV, 849).

Significantly, the number of animals offered is not determined by the nature of the occasion nor by the wealth of the person undertaking the ritual. What does matter is the reception of some sign of favour (lis). If the deities fail to reveal their lis, the sacrificer cannot be ensured that his prayer will be heard or answered.[22] All the characters who become involved in the sacrifice in Plautus' plays view it as a necessary part of their lives. Although they engage in this ritual voluntarily, they always expect some sort of return for their religious behaviour.[23] This notion of do ut des ('I give so that you give') is especially clear in the angry, and irreverent, boast of the leno, Lycus, in Poenulus (II, 455-456):

> quoniam litare nequeo, ...
> iratus, votui exta prosicarier;
>
> (since I was unable to obtain favourable omens, ... I forbade the sacrificial meat to be sliced off;)

By denying the gods their rightful portion of meat Lycius brings shame upon himself. The success of the ceremony is not dependent upon the number of lambs killed. That the gods are not unheeding of members of low Roman life is obvious because Lycus' prostitutes have had their supplication of Venus rewarded - and apparently without incurring great expense. Perhaps Plautus mention how many lambs Lycus has offered to demonstrate that the gods are not impressed by and will not respond to the mere mechanics of sacrifice.

Bloodless offerings also have a significant function in ceremonial sacrifice. In Aulularia (II, 385) Euclio feels required to make an offering to his Lar on the occasion of his daughter's wedding. The gift of a little frankincense and some garlands of flowers, while not inappropriate in itself,[24] is in keeping with his miserly depiction throughout the play.

The sacrificial implements in bloodless rites are of the same excellent quality as is the flesh of the animals chosen for the blood ceremonies. Fine and valuable service plates are commonly used by those desiring to observe the propriety of ritual. The Samia vasa ('Samian dishes') that Philocrates' father uses in Captivi, while petitioning to the spirit of his Genius, are considered of too poor a quality on which to place offerings to a god.[25] The dishes must not only be costly, but also clean. In Captivi (IV, 860-861) the parasite Ergasilus urges Hegio not to overlook the preparation of unstained dishes (vasa pura) for the ceremony in honour of his son's return. Those who participate in the ceremony must also be clean, as the bridegroom, Megadorus, notes in Aulularia (III, 579). The cleanliness of one's body is complemented by the wearing of suitable apparel for the sacrifice. The priestess in Rudens (I, 269-271) admonishes the shipwrecked maidens for their bedraggled state:

> ergo aequius vos erat
> candidatas venire hostiatasque: ad hoc
> fanum ad istunc modum non veniri solet.
>
> (then it would have been more fitting to come dressed in white and bearing offering of victims: it is not customary to visit this temple is such a state.)

But cleanliness and appropriate clothing are not the only requirements of correct ritual procedure. Some people in Plautus believe that the physical attractiveness of the worshipper is just as important to the gods as prayer, gifts etc. The courtesan, Adelphasium, in the Poenulus (I, 320-323) feels that Venus, the goddess renowned for beauty, is particularly sensitive about the matter:

> quae habent nocturna ora, noctu sacruficatum ire occupant.
> ... nam vigilante Venere si veniant eae, ita sunt turpes,
> credo ecastor Venerem ipsam e fano fugent.
>
> (women who have nightmare faces rush off to sacrifice at night. ... for, if they should come when Venus is awake, they are so ugly that - by Castor! - I believe they'd drive Venus herself from the temple.)

The belief that some sort of moral worth, or at least social prestige, attaches to a physically attractive individual is as old as Homer[26] in the classical world. When Adelphasium preaches the idea the audience is not unaware of the exaggeration and her attempt at self-promotion. Plautus portrays the courtesan as rather vain about her beauty, the stock weapon of her profession. Yet Plautus may intend the more sophisticated Romans to question whether there is, in fact, any connection between a person's physical appearance and his ability to gain a favourable reaction from the gods. This must remain a speculation, however, because there is little evidence in the plays on which to base a conclusion.

In summary, both the conduct and the dramatic speeches of Plautus' characters indicate the relevance, for the playwright, of sacrificial ceremony and of a civic responsibility to preserve its dignity. People

of many different class backgrounds are seen praying and offering gifts in petition or in thanksgiving. There are a variety of sacred occasions in the comedies, ranging from the serious moments of birth, marriage and death to such personal situations as a husband treating his Lar as an ally in a domestic tiff. The gods whose assistance or guardianship is invoked, are frequently those of especially Roman origin or reshaping. For example, the ancient and intimate bond between a male and the Roman figure of the Lar Familiaris or Genius is continually envisioned in the plays. Such spirits are defined as vital either to the domestic or to the psychological well-being of Plautus' male characters. A similar attachment is evident in female characters by the way tha Iuno Lucina inspires the devotion of the expectant mother. Hence, the Greek model of Iuno is not as consistently identified with these significant occasions in a woman's life as is the cult of Iuno in Roman Comedy. The role that Venus plays in Plautus' development of the courtesan also reveals how the Roman playwright has specialized the working of the Greek goddess Aphrodite, who is the archetype of feminine charm and trickery.

Whenever there is any suggestion in Plautus that ceremonial sacrifice might be profaned either by the deceitful motivation of a character, such as Epidicus, or by the refusal of the sacrificer to abide to ritual propriety, like Lycus in Poenulus, the audience is provided the means to judge correctly the signficance of the scene. The shame that attends to the misuse of sacred rituals is obvious in the dramatic context. The person who is involved, is generally of low social status.[27] But Plautus is not afraid to show that even high-

class Romans can demean their rank if they abuse rites of thanksgiving or petition for reasons of personal advantage. Yet, it seems that Plautus is more concerned to uphold sacrificial rites as an enriching part of religious practice than to condemn a particular social class for occasional lapses into irreverent activity. Such an attitude reflects Plautus' ability to make comedy touch upon the truths of human nature in a humorous and instructive way. We laugh at the parasite, Ergasilus, and his 'pious' insistence that the lamb chosen by Hegio for sacrifice be a 'succulent' one (pinguem). The fun contained in all the parasite's imaginary preparations for sacrifice helps to convey and to sustain the dramatic purpose of the theme of sacrificial thanksgiving in Captivi. Plautus is celebrating, in a subtle fashion, how happily human life is affected when man expresses through religious ceremony the dependence of his life upon divine power.

III

Religious Festivals

A minor, but thematically significant, part of religious observance is found in Plautus' treatment of the festival (feriae). Unlike sacrificial ceremony, the celebration of festivals is never portrayed on stage. Plautus restricts the theme of this religious occasion to the position of a brief narrative account by a character of his or her experience while attending the public worship. Of all the many festivals that Plautus could have drawn upon for inclusion in the plays only those of three major Greek deities are mentioned: the Cerealia (Aul., IV, 794; Merc., I, 101); The Dionysia (Cist., I, 90; Cur., V,

644-645); and the Aphrodisia (Poen., I, 339-340). One reason for the exclusiveness of the selection may be that references to the festivals of Ceres, Dionysus and Aphrodite seem more appropriate to the Greek setting and to the origin of palliata as adaptations of Greek New Comedy. Another, and more persuasive, reason resides in the nature of the divinities themselves. All three are associated with elements of fertility, sexual license and freedom from inhibition. The sense of a lack of restraint is conveyed in most of the descriptions made by characters of events that they experienced while participating in festivals. It also agrees with the normal characteristics of festivals in Roman religion. The phrase ferias observare refers to the dispensation from work given to Romans during the worship; all the regular pursuits of life were considered taboo at festival time.[28]

Plautus indicates that attendance at festivals is viewed by the characters as an important part of their religious experience and is enjoyable in its own right. Parents or individuals placed in the position of nurses in care of charges are referred to as conducting young people to festivals (e.g. Cist., I, 90; Cur., V, 644-645). But, the type of pleasure that Agorastocles (Poen., I, 191-192) describes as his own view of the allure of a festival suggests the underlying point of Plautus' handling of the worship:

> oculos ... meos delectare munditiis meretriciis.
> (to feast my eyes upon the elegantly arrayed courtesans.)

Even the formation of his name ('the glory of the market-place') hints at Agorastocles' promenade through the festal area to search out and

maneuvre for a passing liaison. In other words, the festival, though religious in nature, is more open to abuse than is the ceremony of honorific or tributary sacrifice. It approaches closely to a holiday setting, or to a modern county fair, in that all types of people flock to the public ceremony and react to it in a spirit of 'time off' from their normal occupations.

Plautus shows the dangers latent in the relaxed atmosphere of the festival, especially the disasters that can befall women. In Aulularia (I, 36) a young girl, separated from her attendant, becomes the victim of rape:

> illam stupravit noctu,
> (he violated her by night,)

Another young woman (Cur., V, 648) is abducted during a sudden storm and sold into the possession of a leno. The courtesan, Adelphasium, angrily tells her lover that the festival is used for the transaction of business:

> apud aedem Veneris hodie est mercatus meretricius: eo conveniunt mercatores, (Poen., I, 339-340).
>
> (at the temple of Venus today there is a sale of courtesans: the merchants are gathering there [or, 'for just that reason'].)

The audience realizes that her complaint over this activity also arises from her own fear at being sold at the temple of Venus[29] and of thus losing her lover. Nonetheless, there is a trace of sadness that

members of her profession are denied the opportunity to enjoy the same freedom that others come to the festival to express.

Plautus makes his strongest statement against behaviour at the festival in Aululariа (IV, 794). Lyconides blames the licentious atmosphere of the festival in honour of Ceres for his having fallen prey to the temptation of wine and its further consequences. It is not the festival itself that Plautus censures, but rather the relaxed setting that may lead to excess in drink and in sexual experience. This is surely the point of the two accounts in which young women suffer serious physical assault during festival celebration. Finally, the portrayal of a business transaction during a sacred portion of the Aphrodisia, a time that has been formally set aside for a public gathering and worship of the goddess, indicates that the offense lies not with the ceremony, but in its misuse by certain Romans.

IV

Temples

The physical edifice of the Roman temple owes its inspiration and architectural form first to the influence of Etruria and later to that of the Greeks. The temple building is primarily the residence or the house of the god. Worship in the form of sacrifices was kept outside the temple, at altars erected in front of the building. Prayers in veneration of the god were permitted in the cella ('sanctuary') of the temple.[30]

In Plautus' comedies people go to the temple in much the same way as they would go to visit a good friend. In two instances (Bacc., II,

347 and IV, 900-901), although the mention of visiting a temple is used as a ruse to deceive people about the true location of characters, it is clear that the excuse is not only plausible but also respectable. For example, Chrysalus lies to a captain about the whereabouts of his property, the courtesan, Bacchis, by saying that she has gone to see Minerva. The verb Plautus uses (visere, IV, 901) is frequently found in the literature of all periods in situations of visiting friends and relatives. It is suggestive of a casual and friendly relationship. Similarly, in (II, 347) the slave, Chrysalus misleads Nicobulus into thinking that his son has gone to the Forum 'to greet the gods and his friends'. The collocation of the words in the phrase deos amicos salutatum indicates the ease with which Romans could transfer actions bestowed upon other human beings to their outlook on the gods. Thus the temple building is an important structure in the god's identity.

In Plautus the temple is also considered to be a place of sanctuary. In fact, Charmides (Rud., II, 586) regards the temple as a good place to relax after his ordeal in a shipwreck:

> quin abeo huc in Veneris fanum, ut edormiscam hanc crapulam,
>
> (why not drop into this temple of Venus to sleep off this hangover?)

The helpless and the unfortunate are afforded divine protection within the sacred precinct. Trachalio (Rud., III, 648-649) condemns as blasphemy Labrax's attempt to dislodge two young maidens who have taken sanctuary in Venus' temple:

Veneris signum sunt amplexae. nunc homo audacissumus eas deripere volt.
eas ambas esse oportet liberas.

(They are embracing the statue of Venus. And now a bare faced rascal wants to tear them away. And both of them ought to be free by right.)

Even the altar that is erected outside the facade of the temple can be used as a place of refuge. Tranio in Mostellaria (V, 1095) rushes to an altar to avoid being punished for having assisted his aged master's son in enjoying a riotous life during the old man's absence.

The priestess of the temple of Venus sums up in her brief remark the spirit of selfless and affectionate reverence she feels towards her mistress:

Veneri cibo meo servio. (Rud., I, 283)

(I service Venus, and at my own expense.)

The priestess is a humble figure appearing briefly in this scene, but she instructs not only the shipwrecked girls, but more importantly the audience in the regulations that acknowledge and preserve the rightful dignity of the temple.

Religious observance in the comedies of Plautus is characterized by three areas of activity: private and semi-formal ceremonies in which sacrifices and prayers are performed in petition or in thanksgiving of divine favour; the public celebration of various gods through the setting aside of specific periods of time to be devoted to festival worship; and the attendance upon the temple which was regarded as the residence of the god. The most significant religious practice of the

three appears to have been the tributary or honorific sacrifice because of its close identification, by Plautus, with the duties and the meaningful experiences of man's daily life. In each area Plautus makes it clear that any abuse of the ritual or of the sacred time or place derives not from any superficiality in the religious practice, but from the failure of human beings to respect its dignity.[31] The only area in which Plautus reveals some skepticism is that of the festival because of its general atmosphere of personal license. Plautus' comedies promote examples of religious activity that reinforce, for the audience, man's need to communicate with the gods and to recognize the relevance of supernatural actions in his life.

Notes

1. Cicero, De Divin., 11.104

2. "... taboos inherited from the stone age were observed with an outward scrupulousness that bordered on the absurd." (Carey 1965, 54-55).

3. Livy, 22. 57.2

4. See my discussion of pietas in Plautus' comedies, Chapter 5, p. 17-24.

5. e.g. Bacchides (IV, 642-44)

   Erum maiorem meum ut ego hodie lusi lepide, ut lupificatust.
   callidum senem callidis dolis
   compuli et perpuli mi omnia ut crederet.

   (How I have deceived my elder master today - and cleverly done, as befits the trick.
   I pushed him, I hustled him so that he now trusts me in all matters.)

6. e.g. Captivi (IV, 768ff)

   Iuppiter supreme, servas me measque auges opes,
   maxumas opimitates opiparasque offers mihi,
   laudem, lucrum, ludum, iocum, festivitatem, ferias,
   pompam, penum, potationes, saturitatem, gaudium,

   (Jupiter on high, you preserve me and prosper me with plenty, you offer me boundless and sumptuous abundance, praise, profit, joy, jollity, fun, festivity, a train of victuals, drink to my belly's content and delight,)

7. M.R. Shilling (1975, 344-345) briefly discusses this type of lectisternium and provides Livy's list of the paired divinities (Livy, 22. 10.9)

8. W.W. Fowler (1911, 172) identifies three distinct groups of sacrifice amount the ancients:

   A. Tributary or honorific;

   B. Piacular: the atonement of guilt by the offering of blood victims. (In 364 B.C. the Roman State had introduced this type of sacrifice, and had imported Etruscan dancers to help in this ritual propitiation against a plague.);

C. Sacramental: the worshipper enters into communion with the deity by partaking of the holy offering together with him.

The sacramental sacrifice is generally considered the oldest form of the three. Man is physically involved in the ritual action. It is significant that Roman State religion discouraged worshippers from assuming an active role in cult ceremony. This reduction of the worshipper to the status of an observer perhaps contributed to the lessening importance of sacramental sacrifice. There is no instance of the rite in Plautus.

9. This term will be left in the original because it does not lend itself to any single English equivalent. A leno does not entirely correspond to that of his modern counterpart, the pimp. In Plautus the leno is happy to have a brisk trade in ladies. He does not, as does the modern pimp, seek to increase their dependence upon him. In Persa (IV, 471-3) the leno Dordalus boasts of his good fortune in freeing one of his girls because it will mean one less mouth to feed.

10. OCD^2, 1970, 943.

11. Rose, 1948, 17. The Romans believed that sacrifice benefitted not only the suppliant but also the god. While performing the ceremony the sacrificer utters: Macte esto ('Be thou increased'). The formula shows the ancient belief that the numen ('power') of the god was somehow enhanced by the offering; he would, in turn, be better equipped to serve the petitioner.

12. Fowler (p. 251) points out that on certain days of each month and on all dies festi ('feast days') a prayer was offered to the household Lar. However, in Aulularia (Prologue, 23-24), Plautus indicates that the god was worshipped daily.

13. Fowler (1924, 136) believes that on the occasion of a marriage sacrifice was offered to Ceres; J. Carcopino (1964, 95) may be correct in arguing that the supplication was to a number of gods. Although he provides no list of names, Iuppiter and Iuno are the two most important divine symbols of marriage as a social institution. H.J. Rose (1926, 150) maintains that Iuno was the female counterpart of the male Genius. She is the source of woman's power to generate life. Brides customarily prayed to Iuno as the goddess who exhibited as part of her nature the power of reproduction within the family unit. The human prayer would be a petition for an increase of the woman's fertility. See also Bailey (1911, 85). Other likely deities to be supplicated are the gods who are specifically in charge of the wedding ceremony or the wedding night. There is also the possibility that the bridegroom sacrificed to his Lar Familiaris to accept his future bride under divine service and protection. There is some evidence suggesting a requirement on the part of

the bridegroom to introduce a new family member to the household spirit. Rose (1926, 140) tells us that on the morning following the consummation of the marriage the bride made offerings to her husband's deities.

14. Nixon, Vol V, 1938, 105.

15. Bailey, 1911, 39.

16. e.g. Mostellaria (II, 431-432)

Habeo, Neptune, gratiam magnam tibi,
quom med amisisti a te vix vivom domum.

(I'm deeply grateful to you Neptune since you have sent me home alive, though scarcely alive.)

17. Both he and his elderly friend Apoecides are called columen senati ('pillars of the Senate', 189).

18. See Catullus, Carmen 34, 13-14 in which the assistance and protection of Iuno Lucina is invoked by women in the throes of childbirth.

19. Plautus may be referring to the Parentalia ('the festival of dead parents' or of ancestors and relatives generally) which was, in effect, a communal repetition of the rite of burial. Lucretius later indicates that parentare ('to sacrifice in honour of the dead parents') is an action regularly associated with the offering of black cattle (De Rerum Natura, III, 51-53) to the spirits of the dead. Cf. Bailey (1932, 100-101) who argues, however, that Lucretius must mean here an offering to the gods of the Underworld, for whom the typical offering was a dark-coloured animal.

20. Blood offering may also be a part of the wedding ceremony. Cf. Aulularia (II, 567) where Megadorus assures us that he has not overlooked a sacrificial animal on the occasion of his marriage.

21. OCD[2] (1970, 944) discusses the strict code that governed blood offerings. Only beasts without blemish could be used; it was customary to sacrifice male animals to gods and female victims to goddesses.

22. The lis depends upon the pronouncement by a priest that the entrails of the victim, upon inspection, are found to be normal. See Rose, 1948, 37. Sandy (1963, 158) mentions that the flute player was an important figure in State services because the noise of his music drowned out all ill-omened sounds!

23. Schilling, p. 351.

24. Sometimes the object offered in bloodless sacrifices is sacred to a particular god. For example, in Mercator (IV, 675-677) Dorippa seals her prayer to Apollo for the prosperity of her household with the gift of a laurel branch (virga lauri), a common emblem of the god.

25. Samia vasa do not denote a particular type of ware. They were first produced and exported by Samos. Hence, any type of ceramic tableware became known as Samian. In this context the title simply refers to ceramic pottery used for ordinary purposes. See F.O. Waagé, 1937, 46-55. The cheap quality of Samia vasa is also mentioned in Bacchides (II, 202).

26. In Homer (Iliad, 2, 209-272) Thersites addresses the assembled Argive heroes, and generally sticks to the truth about their desperate distuation at Troy and about the responsibility of Achilles and Agamemnon in the matter. Odysseus is allowed to beat him upon the head and to push him to the ground. No shame attaches to his action, apparently because of Thersites' physical ugliness. The heroes all laugh in mockery of the silly sight he presents. See W. Jaeger, 1945, 416, note 4.

27. Plautus shows the corruptive influence that economic pursuits exercise, especially upon people of low social position through the figure of the leno is Pseudolus (I, 265-267)

nam si sacruficem summo Ioui
atque in manibus exta teneam uti poriciam, interea
loci si lucri detur, potius rem divinam deseram.

(... for, if I were offering sacrifice to Iove Supreme and I were holding the organs in my hand to place on the altar, were an opportunity for profit to come along, I would far rather desert the sacred act.)

28. "As of old on the farm no work was to be done on such days, so in the city no public business could be transacted." (Fowler, 1924, 286)

29. Venus' festal day was April 23 on which prostitutes made sacrifice to her. Some of the oriental goddesses who were identified with Venus maintained harlots in their service (Rose, 1948, 94).

30. Ogilvie, 1969, 45.

31. There are two examples in Plautus (Curc., IV, 471, 481) where the audience sees people abuse the respect owing to the sacred area of the temple. The manager of the Curculio alludes to the environs behind the temple of Castor and to the temple of Venus Cloacina ('the Purifier') as the haunts of disreputable types.

People in whom no faith can be placed frequent the temple, perhaps in the hope that the dignity of the area will give credibility to their tricks. The audience would feel the impropriety of their presence and their behaviour.

Chapter Four

The Signs of the Gods

Among the ancient peoples of Greece and Italy divination was considered to be an expression of religio. Its objective was to ascertain whether god's will would approve or oppose the performance of a specific human activity. Divination was an especially popular and useful practice during a predominantly agricultural period. The observation of natural phenomena (diosemeia, 'signs from heaven') and of the noises or the movements of birds and other animals was used by farmers as a means of predicting the weather. Thus divination was an important resource for the peasant in his struggle to cultivate and to increase the productivity of his land.

As centres of Roman urban life developed and began to exercise an influential role in religious matters, divination became absorbed into the highly organized machinery of State religion. A formal set of rules was laid out to govern society in its attempt to learn the disposition of divine will. If a favourable response was obtained, it was believed to be divine confirmation of an action or an undertaking of national significance. The patrician ruling class at Rome had delegated the right of taking auspicia ('the skill of seeking and of recognizing divine signs') to a magistrate.[1] A priestly college of augures ('augurs') was instituted, whose authority was limited to that of assisting the magistrate by providing him guidance in matters of

interpretation.[2] Rome tended to discourage the ordinary citizen from an active participation in the public rite of augury. There was consequently a decline in the belief that divination served a valuable religious purpose. The restriction of the auspicia to the noble class of patricians had been another early device to exclude the plebeian class from a personal involvement in divination.[3] Moreover, the lore of the disciplina auguralis ('the body of traditionally accepted procedures for the taking of omens') was covered in secrecy and never divulged to the public. The plebeian class gradually became contemptuous of a practice from which they were excluded and which was often misdirected to promote the private ends of an aristocrat to the detriment of the general welfare.[4]

The importance of the auspicia, particularly private ones, in the Roman world is attested nowhere more forcibly than by Cicero:

> nihil fere quondam maioris rei nisi auspicato ne privatim quidem gerebatur
> (De Div., 16.28)
>
> ('In ancient times almost nothing of any significance was undertaken, not even in private life, without first the consultation of the auspices.')

The paterfamilias was entrusted with the interpretation of those omens that pertained to the orderly domestic routine of his individual household. Auspices were sought on such occasions as a marriage or on the sowing and the harvesting of crops. Following the transformation from an agrarian to an urban based society the conventional Roman continued to observe and to have faith in the genuine personal advantages to be derived from private divination. During the Second Punic War however,

public augury was unable to interpret reliably the portents that were received about the outcome of that war. It is possible that the credibility of even private augural practice may have been thus lessened. Plautus seems particularly concerned with the meaning and the role of private divination. His comedies depict this rite almost exclusively. Instances may be found of augury by specialized interpreters[5], but there is no mention of divination in its official State capacity in Plautus' works.

I

Omens and Augury

The numerous references to omens and augury in Plautus are indicative of their special place in the religious experience of his characters. There are twenty-three occurrences of omens, with more than one example in each of Asinaria, Aulularia, Casina, Mercator, Poenulus and Trinummus. The noun omen is used ten times; the verb ominari ('to prophesy') once; and the derivative ominator ('a diviner') once.[6] Plautus consistently portrays omens as the legitimate expression and the source of divine sanction or condemnation. Augury is presented as an essential, time-honoured custom to determine whether a proposed course of action will receive the gods' sanction. Plautus never suggests that his characters are mystified by augury or find it an inaccessible practice. On the contrary, his characters devote great amounts of time to the reading of signs. The influence of divination upon every aspect of human life in the comedies is clear. It is a serious religious habit, one that dictates human thought and plans of action.

Consultation of the auspices takes place at the beginning of each day. Toxilus (Per., IV, 689), a slave, plots to sell a freeborn girl into the services of a leno. He convinces Dordalus that she is a slave captured in war and hence of some value to his profession. As it turns out, of course, the leno is destined to forfeit his money because free-born women may not be sold into prostitution. But Dordalus throws aside caution in his eagerness to transact business. In his view the offer is the fulfilment of that morning's signs:

> lucro faciundo ego auspicavi in hunc diem:
>
> (I have read in augury that this is to be a day of financial profit for me.)

In a more humorous way, the leno Labrax (Rud., III, 717) defends an attempt to dislodge two courtesans from the protective sanctuary of Venus' altar by citing divination as his authority. When the slave Trachalio suggests that a senator be brought in to decide the issue, Labrax haughtily replies:

> non hodie isti rei auspicavi, ut cum furcifero fabuler.
>
> (I did not receive today as an omen for the matter at hand that I would find myself gossiping with a 'gallows-bird'.)

The audience will laugh at the way that both omens are interpreted by the figure of the leno to his own private benefit. The importance of seeking divine guidance, however, remains unchallenged. Labrax's use of the negative term furciferus to insult the dignity of the slave may contain a deeper meaning. Its ancient connotation with an historical event of ill-omen suggests that Labrax may be trying to avert bad luck.[7]

Auspices are also taken by individuals before any major enterprise, particularly at the beginning of a battle. In Persa (IV, 606-608) Plautus magnifies, for the pleasure of his audience, the nature of the trick that Toxilus seeks to work at the expense of the leno Dordalus. He admonishes the girl to behave as though she were entering a 'battle' (proelium) and to attend to the questions of the leno in confidence that the gods will protect their 'warrior'.

> age, age nunc tu, in proelium vide ut ingrediare auspicato.
>
> (Come on! Come now, know that you enter the battle under happy auspices.)

The woman sustains the metaphoric confusion by assuring the slave that she understands the strategy (liquidumst auspicium, the auspices are bright). She further boasts that she will return to 'camp' well laden with 'booty' (that is, with the leno's cash). Beneath the comic skill evident in construction of the scene Plautus has managed to introduce, for the audience's consideration, the serious implications of taking the auspices before battle. In 249 B.C. P. Claudius Pulcher and his colleague, Junius Pullus, both experienced the destruction of a Roman fleet at the hands of the Carthaginians. The Roman officers had failed to show the proper respect for the auspicia before engaging in naval war; Claudius' ships were driven ashore at Drepana, where the majority of them fell into the possession of the enemy; the fleet of Junius was driven toward the coast off Cape Passaro and was subsequently wrecked by a gale.[8] Late, in 217 B.C., Gaius Flaminius did not perform any of his religious duties because of an impatience to reach his army,

stationed at Arretium. He died, his forces being completely defeated, at Trasimene. Thus, beneath the playful mood of a slave and a woman acting out the responsibilities of a combatant, Plautus contrives to reinforce the sacred meaning of augury by awakening the audience's memory of how its neglect led to three disasters of national consequence.

Auspices are sought on special occasions, such as before a wedding. In the Prologue of Casina (86) the manager of the play laughingly contrasts the chaste character of Casina with the true nature of the performer acting her part. The actress is depicted as a shameless gold-digger, one who for the sake of money would plunge into marriage without consulting the auspicia. The fact that Plautus would place this remark in so prominent a setting as the Prologue, where matters concerning plot and the proper attitude to adopt towards characters are found, suggests his concern for the preservation of religious instinct. The audience will admire all more the portrayal of the purity of the model Casina because they have been made aware, by the manager, that the woman who plays her part has been condemned for her disregard of divine sanction. It is an irony that runs through the play.

Often the gods are shown by Plautus as approving a course of action without any formal attempt by the character to invoke a sign. This type of auspice is called oblativa ('unasked'). It is important to note that in such instances Plautus' characters always treat these unsolicited signs with respect because they are believed to be a revelation of divine interest in and protective guidance of human endeavour.

The observation and interpretation of *auguria* ('the signs displayed by birds') is a significant part of the ritual of private divination in Plautus' works. An ancient commentator, M. Psellus (11th century), remarks that Roman augurs carefully studied four particular areas in the behaviour of birds: their flight; any variation in their cries; their physical appearance when stationary; and their actions in general.[9] The flight of birds and the direction from which they are seen to approach man was supposed to indicate imminent good or bad fortune. Epidicus (*Epid.*, II, 183-184) is sure that he can easily swindle his old master and find the money required to pay the debt that his young master owes to a money-lender. The source of his confidence is an unsolicited appearance of a bird on the left side:

> liquido exeo foras auspicio, avi sinistera;
> (I'm leaving with a bright omen, a bird on my left side.)

Although most of the passage under discussion that pertain to the omens derived from birds concern signs that are *oblativa*, it is noteworthy that Plautus' characters are quick to grasp the numinous significance in such an apparition.

The auspicious quality of the arrival of a bird *ex parte sinistera* ('from the left space' or 'direction') is also mentioned by Pseudolus (*Pseud.*, II, 761-762) who plots to deceive the *leno* Ballio into handing over to him a slave girl already promised to a soldier. Plautus combines the theme of *auspicia* again with the image of a battle. As in *Persa*, Pseudolus describes the trick in language that denotes his preparation for a military exploit, a campaign into which:

> I'll lead my legions, all in a line of battle beneath their standards.

The incongruity in the scene of a slave's petty attempt to cheat a leno out of a prostitute does not so much point at the insignificance of the task to which the omens are being applied. Rather, in a humorous way, Pseudolus assumes the pose of a general in command of an army. He cautiously observes the proper duties of his 'leadership'. A real general would formally watch the skies before battle and request his augur to interpret the signs of the birds' flight or movement. Pseudolus has received an unasked for omen of success; his confidence in the divine approval of his adventure is real, despite the fact that the purpose that underlines his use of the auguria is deceitful. Plautus may possibly intend, in the paradoxical combination of theme and image, to remind the audience of Flaminius, who was mentioned earlier in the paper. As a general, he was derelict in his responsibility to consult the gods and to obtain their sanction before the battle at Trasimene. In one sense, Pseudolus appears the better 'commander' because, even though his omen was received oblativa, he did not lack the religious instinct to respect and to act upon its meaning.

In Asinaria (II, 260-261) the slave Libanus defines the significance of a bird's direction in flight in words that would affect those in the audience of an agricultural background. In the search to find the money needed by his master Demaenetus to assist his son in a love affair, Libanus receives an unexpected omen, which he reads as favourable:

picus et cornix ab laeva, corvos, parra ab dextera consuadent;

(woodpecker and crow on the left, raven and barn-owl on the right join to say: 'Go ahead!')

The only tactic that Libanus can call upon to acquire the sum is theft. The fun in such resourcefulness is intensified by the way in which the folklore of farmlife is used to verify the advantageous significance of the unasked divine sign. Those in the audience of an agrarian upbringing may thus appreciate the resilient nature of Libanus who, like their ancestors, has been forced to seize upon any device in hard times. In each of the three passages discussed above, the omen has a basis in fact. Epidicus does successfully swindle his old master; Pseudolus relieves the leno of the slave girl; and Libanus manages to provide the necessary funds through the sale of some asses. The unsolicited nature of the omen does not hinder its efficacy. Plautus is careful to demonstrate how gladly and seriously even the character of inferior class status treats the sudden appearance of prophetic creatures.

Sometimes an omen may be subject to misinterpretation. For example, in Aulularia (IV, 624-625) Euclio believes that the arrival of a raven in his left side indicates a warning not to leave his gold in the grove surrounding the shrine of Fides ('Good Faith'):

non temere est quod corvos contat mihi nunc ab laeva manu; semul radebat pedibus terram et voce croccibat sua:

(It's no accident that a raven cawed on my left just now; And all the time he was clawing the ground, he was cawing away:)

Euclio removes the gold to the 'sacred grove' (lucus) of Silvanus,

whence it is stolen by Strobilus. The precinct is described as 'outside the walls and remote' (extra murum est avius, IV, 674). Euclio's mistrust of his fellow man is suggested through the image of the gold being transferred from a holy place in a civilized environ to an isolated spot in the wilderness. Furthermore, Euclio shows his disrespect of the numinous presence of the god, Fides, and the power of the divine being to oversee the relationship of trust that should exist among men. Plautus may intend his audience to consider the social unacceptability of a man who values material goods over his just relationship to the gods and his fellow man. Euclio's misinterpretation of the omen's meaning is a sign to the audience of his shallowness.

The omen that is obtained from an accidental meeting with an animal in Casina (V, 971-973) is also misread. Lysidamus wishes his bailiff, Olympio, to marry Casina so that he himself can enjoy the wedding night with her. The wife of Lysidamus and his son's orderly, Chalinus, who impersonates Casina by wearing her dress and veil, succeed in tricking the old man and his bailiff. Lysidamus is caught in the act of escape and likens Chalinus to a wolf and his wife to a dog:

> hac lupi, hac canes: lupina scaeva fusti rem gerit; hercle opinor permutabo ego illuc nunc verbum vetus: hac ibo, caninam scaevam spero meliorem fore.
>
> (On this side a wolf, on that a dog: the wolf omen [lit. 'left'] does business with a club. I think I will now change that old proverb. I will go this way, the dog omen will be better - I hope.)

The hilarious battle between husband, bailiff and wife is intensified by the transvestite Chalinus. The purity and innocence of 'Casina' is contrasted to the illicit motives of the two men who desire, for their

own reasons, to misuse her femininity. Lysidamus' sensation of being flanked by a wolf and a dog conjures up the danger faced by the shepherd of a flock. The appearance of the wild dog had long symbolized bad luck to the Romans.[10] Lysidamus does not fare any better with the 'dog'. His allusion to omens that derive from a pastoral setting suggests how far he slipped from his role as protector of wife and family. The punishment that will be meted out to him by an ill-omened 'animal' is less serious than the damage he intended to inflict upon an innocent woman, whose physical purity he should have safeguarded.

Similarly, in Stichus (III, 459-463) a character is forced to re-evaluate the meaning of an omen. The parasite, Gelasimus, initially sees a favourable outcome in a chance meeting with an animal:

> Auspicio hodie optumo exivi foras:
> mustella murem apstulit praeter pedes;
> quom strena opscaevavit, spectatum hoc mihist.
> nam ut illa vitam repperit hodie sibi,
> item me spero facturum: augurium hac facit.
>
> (I had the best omen today when I went outside:
> a weasel carried off a mouse right in front of my feet;
> Since this omen crossed my path, I cannot regard it mere chance.
> For just as the weasel found for himself sustenance ['life'] today,
> so do I hope to find mine:
> that is what the omen means.)

When Epignomus intentionally excludes the parasite from his table, Gelasimus decides that he must have misinterpreted the omen. But it is interesting that he does not accordingly scorn or deny the validity of this type of prophecy. Nor does he cease to believe in the divine significance of the weasel; he simply revises his attitude concerning the animal's auspicious function:

certumst mustelae posthac numquam credere,
(Stich., III, 499)

(I'll never trust a weasel after this - that's for sure!)

Plautus shows Gelasimus doubting his own ability to read correctly the gods' messages. The parasite never questions whether or not the gods do indeed send omens by the way of the weasel. The audience may thus conclude that misinterpretation of auspicia by individual characters in Plautus' comedies is never a basis upon which the playwright teaches the rejection of divine signs or of their right to influence human decisions.

II

Onomastic Omens

Omens are obtained not only from the actions of birds or from chance encounters with various animals, but also from the very content of a name itself. The latter group is known as onomastic signs. Plautus' characters exhibit a great dependence upon the significance conveyed by a name. For example, Toxilus (Per., IV, 625) believes that the name of the freeborn girl whom he is trying to sell to Dordalus as a slave is prophetic of his own imminent success in business:

nomen atque omen quantivis iam est preti.

(now that's a name: an omen worthy of any price!)

The girl is called Lucris ('Lady Profit') and the leno, Dordalus, indeed experiences financial ruin when he is unable to recoup his losses for purchasing a free woman. The omen thus turns out to the

luck of Toxilus and to the disadvantage of Dordalus, who foolishly misread the correct application of her name:

> si te emam,
> mihi quoque Lucridem confido fore te.
> (IV, 626-627)
>
> (If I should buy you, I am sure that you'll be Lucris for me too.)

Plautus deliberately draws the audience's attention to the interplay of a name and its ability to be a divine presage in the collocation of Toxilus' words nomen atque omen. The eagerness of the leno to obtain for himself a feminine personification of financial gain causes him to missappropriate Lucris: Plautus may intend to suggest that the gods do not look with favour upon the profession of the leno.

An instance of a name's unfavourable associations is found in Bacchides (II, 283-285). Mnesilochus determines to use some of the money that he has been collecting at the order of his father towards the purchase of a young courtesan with whom he is in love. His slave, Chrysalus, helps by fabricating an involved tale of the difficulties faced by his young master in collecting the money from a particular fellow in Ephesus, named Archidemides. Mnesilochus' father, Nicobulus, duped by the story, grows angry at having trusted Archidemides to return the sum into his son's keeping:

> adeon me fuisse fungum ut qui illi crederem,
> quom mi ipsum nomen eiius Archidemides
> clamaret dempturum esse, si quid crederem?
>
> (Could I have been such an imbecile to trust that fellow,
> when his very name, Archidemides
> should have shouted out to me that I would be taken, if
> I should entrust anything to him?)

The name Archidemides means 'looter of the money-box'. Although it is not he, but rather Nicobulus' son who is guilty of theft, nonetheless the overall bad luck that can befall anyone who associates with a person of such a name is clear to the audience. Nicobulus has been 'taken' (note the paranomasia in the positioning of Archidemides ... dempturum, whose roots are from the verb demo: 'to take away'). The onomastic omen is thus genuine[11] and should not have been neglected by the old man.

Human utterances may be also considered as omens. In Amphitruo, Alcmena has been told by Iuppiter, who has assumed the mortal shape of her husband Amphitruo, that he must return to his ship after their long night of love-making. She is surprised and hurt by this inexplicable turn of events. Later, when her real husband and his slave, Sosia arrive home, she chides Amphitruo (who is unaware of Iuppiter's rape of his wife) for returning yet a second time to break her heart. Sosia exclaims in amazement (718ff.):

> Amphritruo, I hoped that she would bear you a son,
> but she's not heavy with a child ... but rather with
> a crazy streak!

Alcema angrily replies:

> ob istuc omen, ominator, capies quod te condecet.
>
> (And because of that omen, Diviner, you shall get
> exactly what you deserve!)

The audience is fully conscious of Alcmena's pregnant condition; only they know that she is destined to give birth to twins, a mortal son by

Amphitruo and a demigod by Iuppiter. Alcmena, however, is completely unaware of the god's intrusion upon her rightful prerogatives as a wife and mother. Her rebuke of Sosia both intensifies the dignity with which she conducts herself as a Roman matrona in the play and it reminds the slave how carelessly he has acted: words of ill-omen, even spoken in jest, can damage the welfare of herself and her family.[12] Alcmena is the only figure portrayed in the comedy who retains a sense of appropriate Roman conduct and who argues in defense of it.

Similarly, allusions to death in any guise are often regarded as ill-omened speech. In Mostellaria (II, 464) Theopropides is prevented from entering his own home, upon arrival there, by the slave Tranio. To the credit of Tranio, his attempts to bar the old man arise from the good desire of protecting his young master who is partying inside. Theopropides tries to avert in prayer any harm incurred by Tranio's remarks about himself as the potential cause of his family's destruction:

> di te deaeque omnes faxint cum istoc omine.
>
> (May all the gods and goddesses make off with you and that omen of yours!)

Every Roman in the audience would be acutely sensitive to the justifiable anger of Theopropides at this moment in the play. Kin-killing was a sacrilege among the ancients, to whom the preservation of the family was everything. While Plautus succeeds in maintaining the jocular mood of a young man playing 'hooky' from the control of his father, the substance of the omen reminds man of how necessary are the qualities of

self-restraint and pious thoughts if good fortune is to continue.

Verbal injunctions occur as the typical resort of characters in order to prevent something bad from happening. In Asinaria (III, 744-745) Argyrippus tries to wish away Leonida's spoken fears about the terrible consequences if his mother learns of his involvement in theft and in a love affair by exclaiming:

bene dicite.

(speak only favourable words!)

Lysidamus (Cas., II, 345-346) uses the same formula to avert the bad luck that may be caused by Olympio's questions about their plot to misuse Casina's sexuality. As events turn out both Argyrippus and Lysidamus cannot forestall the evil results of their deceitful plans. The injunction bene dicite and other similar expressions may be stereotyped formulae, but they do convey to the audience that there is a deeper, more serious implication behind the superficial air of give-and-take in the dialogue where they occur.[13] Such formulae suggest that the characters who utter them are conscious that their actions are transgressions of right behaviour. Though spoken in fear, the injunction reminds the audience that punishment is inevitable and that unhappiness is brought on by the characters themselves.

III

Dreams

Omens may also occur while man is sleeping. Twice in the comedies characters connect dreams with the desire of god to communicate with

man. Demipho (Mer., II, 225-226) and Daemones (Rud., III, 593-597) plainly believe:

> di ... mirisque exemplis somnia in somnis danunt.
>
> (the gods in wondrous fashion send dreams in our sleep.)
>
> di ...
> ne dormientis quidem sinunt quiescere.
> ... mirum atque inscitum somniavi somnium.
>
> (the gods ... don't even allow us to sleep in peace. ... I have dreamed a wondrous and baffling dream.)

There are two prominent types of dreams in Plautus' plays. The somnia oblativa denote dreams that are not actively sought by man. The somnia impetrativa are dreams that result from man's willingness to be approached in an numinous way through sleep, an experience which he views as an extension of the auspicia.

There are two examples of somnia oblativa in Plautus. Demipho's dream in the passage of Mercator, quoted above, contains a foreboding of the trouble that soon overtakes the scoundrel. On the other hand, Daemones, in the second of the two quoted passages above, receives a prediction of good fortune. Both of the dreams, though symbolic, turn out to be correct in their forecast. The old gentleman, Daemones, does eventually succeed in rescuing the two helpless young maidens in Rudens. Moreover, both dreams also prefigure events that flow naturally from Plautus' development of the characters of Demipho and Daemones. The former deserves to be punished and the latter to be rewarded. By placing the dreams at the outset of the comic action soon to unfold, Plautus is not so much anticipating the plot as he is empha-

sizing dramatically the close relationship between the divine and human spheres of choice. Demipho is is forewarned, through the dream, of the consequences of his evil plans; nonetheless he determines to neglect the meaning of the message. Similarly, the audience is given an opportunity of seeing the elderly Daemones receiving the necessary spiritual assistance that will sustain hope during a trying period.

There is one example of somnia impetrativa found in Curculio (II, 260-263). The dream is properly called a species of incubatio. This refers to a religious rite with a specific procedure to be followed before retiring to bed. The preliminary tasks entailed that the supplicant bathe himself and offer a simple sacrifice of cake or meal. In some instances he also was requested to abstain from food, wine and sexual intercourse for one or more days prior to the ritual sleep. The supplicant might also be asked to sleep in a temple, or in a prescribed manner, such as remaining unclothed during sleep, or that he lie on the hide of a sacrifical animal.[14] The special care taken by the supplicant in preparing himself for such an unusual occurrence was thought to be a stimulus that would insure the reception of an oracular dream. Incubatio is often associated with human illness; the dream is supposed to convey the nature of the cure required for the supplicant's relief.

In Curculio the leno, Cappadox, is not physically ill, but rather he suffers from a myriad of compliants. He has spent a night in the shrine of Aesculapius, the physician god, in the expectation of some assistance from the god. A dream did come to him, yet the leno's distress is even greater in the morning:

... visus sum viderier
procul sedere longe a me Aesculapium,
neque eum ad me adire neque me
magni pendere visumst.

(I seemed to see Aesculapius sitting at a distance - a long way off from me; it seemed that he neither approached me nor considered me of great value.)

A cook, hearing this account, responds to the dream as a portent of 'great evil' (malum magnum, II, 271). The leno (II, 217-218) also divines the dream as ill-omened; he provides a telling reason for the god's failure to fulfill the normal requirements of incubatio:

... Aesculapi ita sentio sententiam
ut qui me nihili faciat nec salvom velit.

(I feel that Aesculapius' attitude is such that he has no regard for me nor does he wish to cure me.)

Cappadox admits that the god would not normally be negligent of his duties. Aesculapius has shown a disrespect for the leno (and perhaps also for his profession) by simply going through the mechanics of the ritual. The leno is not worthy to approach the god; the distance that separate their interests is reiterated in the tautology of two adverbs procul and longe (II, 261) in the same sentence. Hence there is a vital connection that is expressed by Plautus between human merit and the willingness of a god to help better a human situation. Significantly, even the lowly cook agrees with the god's verdict on Cappadox, although his remarks are carefully phrased in order to protect himself:

item alios deos facturos scilicet:
sane illi inter se congruont concorditer.
(II, 263-264)

(The other gods will do the same thing of course: it's a fact that they all stick together.)

The cook further states that unless Cappadax is able 'to petition and receive Aesculapius' grace' (pacem ab Aesculapio petas, II, 270) all the other gods will continue to remain indifferent to his plight.

There is a harmony then, between the value of the signs that are received by man in a sleeping state and those that occur, asked or unasked, while awake. All the manifestations of the auspicia are genuine and in character with the rightful expectations of the men who obtain them. If the omens forecast that bad events lie in future, it is easy for the audience to accept them because of the evil motivations that drive on the characters they watch. On the other hand, Plautus shows in such figures as Daemones and Casina the beneficial and happy relationship that occurs between the world of gods and men when a man behaves sensibly and with due respect of religion. Plautus succeeds in balancing comic effect and techniques with a careful and consistent picture of the worth of various religious customs.

IV

The Interpreters of Omens

All the passages that have been so far examined show that Plautus' characters are familiar with the rite of private divination and that they are quite capable of reading signs for themselves and of recognizing which particular verbal or physical manifestations may possess prophetic content. Indeed, some Plautine characters actually speak of themselves as diviners. For example, in Curculio (II, 248, 254) both

Palinurus, the slave, and the cook claim to be gifted with such an ability.

There are some passages, however, where Plautus seems to be investigating, in a light-hearted fashion, the value of the specialized interpreter (that is, the haruspex and the hariolus).[15] Several characters prefer to ask the advice of these unofficial diviners of omens. In Poenulus (V, 1205-1206) the two young slave sisters, Adelphasium and Anterastilis, have received an interpretation from an haruspex:

> nimiae voluptatist quod in extis nostris portentumust,
> ... quod haruspex de ambabus dixit.
>
> (It was just too lovely - the omen that was portended in the entrails of our sacrifice ... and what the haruspex said about the two of us.)

It is unclear from the text in what capacity the haruspex would have read the entrails of the victims offered at the temple of Venus, where the girls had gone to worship. It has been stated earlier that the haruspex does not appear to have been a publicly recognized religious official, but that he could be consulted if necessary. The interpretation that the haruspex has given them of their imminent release (1207) turns out to be a correct reading, but Plautus subtly reduces the impact of Adelphasium's praise of the interpreter by showing that the judgment is colored by her vanity. The haruspex had complimented both women on the fact that they outshone the physical beauty of all the other girls who thronged Venus' temple that day.

The leno, Lycus, in the same comedy is more candid in his evaluation:

> qui si quid bene promittunt, perspisso evenit,
> id quod mali promittunt, praesentariist.
> (III, 792-793)
>
> (If they [the hariolus and haruspex] promise something good, it happens very slowly; if they promise something bad - it's right there!)

While it is true that Lycus' outburst arises from a discovery that he has been lured into a trap by Agorastocles, who is seeking to buy out the two young slave sisters, his doubt about the talent of the interpreters is obvious. Plautus has couched the query in the form of a complaint, but a quiet note of skepticism may be sensed by the audience.

Earlier the same leno had openly condemned the entire class of haruspices:

> condigne haruspex, non homo trioboli,
> omnibus in extis aibat portendi mihi
> malum damnumque et deos esse iratos mihi.
> quid ei divini aut humani aequomst credere?
> mina mihi argenti dono postilla datast.
> (II, 463-467)
>
> (A worthy haruspex - that is a man not worth a half-drach-, who told me that in all the organs evil and ruination and heaven's wrath was predicted - for me!
> How can you credit such a man in anything - divine or human?
> Later a gift - a mina of silver was given to me.)

Again Lycus' angry rejection of the haruspices results from their failure to tell him what he wants to hear for his own financial advantage. The leno has just complained to the audience that his offering of six lambs at Venus' temple did not meet with favourable

omens, even though the very modest sacrifice of the slave sisters was propitiously received. He is a miserly creature, as he demonstrates himself by boasting that he punished Venus by withholding the goddess' just portion of the sacrifice. When he sought the assistance of the haruspices, they too let him down by their portents of the doom soon to befall him. He does not credit his luck at having obtained a mina of silver after leaving the temple area to the haruspices. It is rather, for him, a sign that they are charlatans because he found some profit despite their forecast of evil. Now Plautus is especially harsh in his portrayal of this leno. Lycus has no saving qualities; he is exactly what his name denotes - a jackal of a man. Therefore, it is easy to dismiss his censure as nearly blasphemy since the leno is clearly interested only in his own material betterment. He defines everything, even the value of the haruspex, according to the profit derived. This is a debunking of religion that would be shameful in the eyes of the audience. Furthermore, Plautus shows that the leno meets with unfavourable responses both from the official priests who serve Venus and from the unofficial interpreters. The truth is that both sets of omens are accurate; Lycus is a ruined man at the conclusion of the play. In comparison, then, the two passages examined seem to indicate that Plautus is somewhat critical of the unofficial interpreter. Yet the criticism is developed as the attitude of a reprehensible man who displays no awareness of the dignity of any facet of religion. The placement of the two passages is significant. Plautus has considerably toned down Lycus in his abuse of augury by the third act (III, 792-793). In this scene Lycus does seem to suggest that the haruspex

can deliver accurate prophecies; he simply complains that the bad ones always gallop to fulfilment! It is possible to sense, however, that Plautus is uncomfortable with seers who operate at the outskirts of the temple and whose livelihood depends on how advantageously they may read signs for the public.

There are also occasions in the comedies in which individuals speak of specialized interpreters as laughable figures of men. In Rudens (II, 377) fun is poked at the locks of long hair paraded by the hariolus; in Truculentus (II, 601-602) his divinely inspired fits are the subject of ridicule:

> hoc vide! dentibus frendit, icit femur;
> ... nam hariolust qui ipsus se verberat?
>
> (Now just look at this! He's grinding his teeth, slapping his thigh ...
> Surely he is a hariolus - to beat himself up?)

It must always be remembered that, as a comic poet, Plautus would seize any opportunity to put silly, slap-stick behaviour onstage for the pleasure of his audience. The hariolus in Plautus seems to represent the very antithesis of Roman dignitas ('dignity'). If his prophetic interpretations were delivered in the manner suggested above, his whirling and bizarre movements would likely have embarrassed the Romans, who put such value upon a public display of self-discipline. The hariolus is depicted as uncivilized, by Roman terms; his physical appearance may have led to some question, on Plautus' part, of the right of the hariolus to be accepted by the private citizen as a valid interpreter of divine messages.

In summary, divination is the traditionally reputable religious custom of seeking and of interpreting the will of the gods through various signs. These signs are omens obtained through a reading of the significance in the flight of birds or in the physical appearance of animal entrails; in chance encounters with animal life (wild and domestic); in the names of individuals (onomastic omens); and in dreams. Divination was, for the Romans, both a public and a private religious expression. The State cult at Rome had assumed public divination under its control, establishing rigid guidelines and placing the right of interpretation in the power of a magistrate and a prestigious college of associate priests.

The comedies of Plautus are concerned only with the practice of private divination. Such an inclusiveness befits the domestic and intimate nature of the themes developed in his plots. The poet demonstrates that the practice of divination is a beneficial activity for men because his characters continually react in ways that confirm their interest in omens and their belief that these signs are true indications of divine approval or condemnation. Omens are treated as messages from god; hence they exercise a significant influence upon the course of action chosen by characters in the plays.

Members of plebeian class at Rome had long been excluded from a meaningful presence in the performance of public divination. It was a rite covered in secrecy and sometimes shown to be discredited because of illegal political maneuvering of the signs. It is therefore noteworthy that Plautus shows on the public stage the comfortable and familiar relationship that exists between the ordinary man and god when

private divination is maintained with dignity and confidence. Plautus never sets his characters apart from their gods, but rather tries to provide examples of how to remain in a proper alliance with divine will and protection.

Although characters are seen misinterpreting the numinous significance of a particular omen, nowhere does Plautus insist that private interpretation is incorrect religious conduct. Quite the opposite. When mistakes of interpretation are realized, Plautus' characters are quick to see their own error. The gods are not blamed for human mistakes in divination. On some occasions characters consult specialized diviners, such as the haruspex or the hariolus. These diviners were not a recognized part of the Roman State cult. Their brief portrayal in Plautus' comedies seems to suggest that the poet was not convinced that they were authentic representatives of divine communication. Indeed, in Amphitruo (V, 1128 ff.), Amphitruo voices an inclination to visit the seer Tiresias in order to better understand the confusing problems that exist between himself and his wife, Alcmena. But significantly, Iuppiter appears and advises him not to go. Elsewhere, the prophecy of the haruspex in Poenulus concerning the ruin of the leno, Lycus, does happen to agree with the omens read by the official priest of Venus; the leno does suffer financial damage. And Gripus a fisherman in Rudens (IV, 1139-1140), does express his opinion that a hariola can deliver correct readings of an omen. Yet, Gripus compares the hariola to a superstitiosa, which demotes her talent almost to the function of fortune-telling. In other words, the correctness of her interpretation is a matter of chance. Hence, while

Plautus does not openly reject the oracular capacity of the specialized class of interpreters, he does consistently support the ordinary man's ability, if not responsibility, to read omens for himself. The readiness of the divine world to communicate with mankind and to be of assistance in the formulation and in fostering of human plans and decisions is revealed in the numerous occurrences in man's life that are regarded as omens, and hence as harbingers of god. Plautus' characters are sensitive to the numinous quality of all sorts of things they see and hear. The audience is thereby subtly instructed in divination as a prominent and useful ingredient of religious habit.

Notes

1. In early Roman history the chief magistrate of the city was its rex ('king'), who originated from among the patrician class.

2. "It was in all periods the magistrate who was responsible, under the sanction and advice of his assistants, the pontifices ['priests'] and augurs, for the maintenance of the pax deorum ['the peace of the gods']," (Fowler, 1911, 302).

3. Livy (VI, 41) describes the strong opposition of the patrician, Appius Claudius (censor in 312 B.C.) to the opening of the consulship to plebeians. Claudius argues that no plebeian magistrate is created auspicatus ('after taking the auspices and thus consecrated by the auguries'). The Lex Ogulnia (300 B.C.) made plebeians eligible for the priestly colleges; they eventually won a majority in the augural college, which was comprised of 16 members.

4. For example, in 59 B.C. the consul Bibulus tried to invalidate Caesar's agrarian legislation by announcing that he intended servare de caelo ('to watch the heavens'). Caesar wisely took no notice of the threat to seek an omen; the Roman people merely laughed at the tactic. (Fowler, p. 305).

5. It is difficult to define precisely the role of the specialized interpreter under the State cult. Plautus refers in passing to the hariolus ('a soothsayer who whirls and dances') and the haruspex ('a travelling reader of entrails, probably Etrurian in origin'), the latter of whom, Cicero tells us, was sometimes held in disrepute. (De Nat. Deor., II, 11). Plautus does not seem impressed by them, perhaps because they are foreigners; Fowler (p. 298) views them all as quacks. Rose (1948, 89) believes that the haruspex was never an official part of the Roman priesthood, but that he could be consulted, if necessary. Ogilvie (1969, 65) agrees with this opinion and also adds that originally no Roman citizen could be an haruspex. The science had been cultivated by the Etruscans. Although the haruspices were chiefly concerned with the inspection of the livers of animals, they could be requested to interpret other manifestations, such as earthquakes.

6. Oliphant, 1912, 173.

7. Cicero (De Div., 26. 55) relates that during the early wars between Rome and the Italic tribes the Ludi Votivi had been interrupted when Rome was suddenly called to arms. The games were thereafter repeated. At the outset, while the people were taking their seats, a slave appeared, his hands tied (presumably

behind his back) to a furca ('a fork' in the shape of an inverted 'v'); he was led about the circus. Although the games were completed, Cicero says that they had to be repeated at a later date because a rustic reported to the Senate that he had received a dream in which someone disapproved of the intrusion of the slave in the Ludi. It is significant that the rustic failed to deliver the message immediately and suffered for his failure to credit the dream's meaning. The term furciferus ('one who bears a two-pronged fork') came to represent the culprit whose punish- ment was a fork-shaped yoke.

8. Cicero, De Nat. Deor., II. 3.7-8. It is narrated that Claudius Pulcher ignored the warning of the pullarius ('the keeper of the sacred chickens') and had the chickens thrown into the sea.

9. Gulick, 1896, 241.

10. Horace, Odes, III. 27. 1ff.

11. Oliphant (1912, 170-171) argues that the names Lucris and Archidemides are Latin derivatives that the audience would easily recognize. Thus, in these two instances, there is indication that Plautus is not adapting or translating from any Greek play. Elsewhere, Pseudolos (Pseud., II, 712) desperately tries to find the cash to pay for his young master's girlfriend. He eagerly pounces upon the happy meaning of the Greek name of Charinas, his master's best friend:

χάριν τούτῳ ποιοῦ.
(you will do a favour for this man.)

Charinus does indeed supply the required money. And Libanus (Asin., II, 374) suggests to Leonida that there is an ominous import in the name of the bailiff Saurea. The word σαύρα means a lizard of the striped species. Leonida risks the 'stripes' of punishment if he plays the role of Saurea too well. The latter was a famous bully. Cicero (De Div., 40, 103) says that during a sacred ceremony of purification held before the start of an expedition to found a colony, or during a review of an army or before the taking of the census, it was the custom to choose men with names of good omen to lead in the victims. Similarly, during a levy of troops the first soldier enlisted had to possess a lucky name.

12. (Ibid., 45, 102.) At public celebrations of religious rites Romans gave the command: favete linguis ('guard your tongues') to ensure that ill-omened utterances would not invalidate the sanctity of the occasion.

13. Similarly, there are instances of positive verbal injunctions that seek to turn the benign attention or assistance of the gods

upon the prosperity of a family (e.g. Aul., IV, 788: ita di faxint; may the gods grant it.; and Trin., I, 40-41). Cicero (Ibid., 40, 103) says that the formula in Trinummus (ut ... bona, fausta, felix fortuna taque evenat; that [things] may turn out propitiously, pleasantly, prosperously, etc.) was also invoked before entering upon business enterprises. There is evidence in Plautus that it was an 'all-purpose' injunction for averting evil omens.

14. Lewis, 1976, 35.

15. See note 5.

Chapter Five

Religious Belief and Moral Attitude: A Summation

Less than a hundred years after the death of Plautus, during the period of Cicero, Caesar and Lucretius, Roman religion had fallen into a serious state of decline. The skepticism evident in Plautus' time about the existence of gods and the usefulness of performing acts of true religious feeling had taken hold and produced a general unbelief. The signs of an absence of religious awe in the citizens of the first century B.C. were unmistakable: "the abuse of the auspices for the sake of political expediency, the neglect of the calendar and prodigies, and the decay of temples".[1] Clearly, during the second and third centuries, the infiltration and influence of numerous Greek divinities and religious practices and Eastern mystery cults had a damaging effect, in the long run, upon formal religion at Rome. Not only did members of Plautus' audience suffer from the confusing amalgam of Graeco-Roman gods and rituals, but also did those who would view revivals of the playwright's comedies in later generations. The matter at issue, therefore, is to what extent Plautus deliberately or inadvertently promulgated an attitude of religious indifference.

Plautus is not responsible for the incursions made against the ancient Roman pieties by the infiltration of foreign religions into Italy. This had been an historical fact long before Plautus. It was an inevitable outcome of Rome's successful attempts to gain control of

and direct, for her own interests, the economic and political destinies of other societies. Under such circumstances it is to be expected that an exchange and a questioning of religious viewpoints will take place. Moreover, the State cult at Rome had itself done a great deal to damage the religious sense of its people. A professional priesthood and various religious colleges had been established early in the city's emergence as a dominant political force. The dictation by the State cult of public ritual gradually eroded the belief of the ordinary Roman in the significance of the innumerable local sanctities and traditional acts that had been a part of his private religious upbringing. The performance of rituals to propitiate and thank the spirits of nature or of one's ancestors become outmoded as man's lifestyle was influenced by cosmopolitan values. The ritual actions associated with animism were left to the peasant class whose close involvement with the forces of nature tended to isolate it from urban realities.

The distinction made in Roman society between the rights of the plebeian and the patrician classes also harmed religion. For a long while members of the plebeian class were barred from belonging to the priesthood. The State cult refused to allow the common citizen to become physically involved in public worship. When citizens were denied the ability to participate actively in religious ceremonies, the dread of the gods and the sense of their presence and participation in the human sphere quickly lessened. To some Romans in Plautus' time religion was a matter for cynicism. It was considered trivial in comparison with the advantages to be gained from financial or cultural pursuits.

The ruling class of patricians had a strong hold on the State cult and its activities at Rome. Religion thus became subordinated to the status of serving government policies.[2] For example, sacred festivals were converted into occasions of public amusement. The religious origin of these festivals and their appropriate role in expressing a shared religious belief and in unifying the Romans in their sense of being a people was replaced by a secular motive. The staging of gladiatorial contests and of dramas on dies festi gained an immense popularity. Men vied to become sponsors of these forms of entertainment in order to win votes for their candidacy for public office.[3]

The reduction of religion to the status of being a 'handmaid' of political and military decisions is well illustrated by events of a national scale in Plautus' generation. Although Hannibal had been defeated by the end of the Second Punic war (200 B.C.), the Carthaginian leader still remained a serious threat to the Roman nation. The very fact that he had survived the conflict was, for some Romans, a sufficient cause for apprehension. Furthermore, many officials at Rome suspected that Hannibal would be tempted to enter into a coalition with his former ally, Philip of Macedon, and with Antiochus of Syria for the purpose of invading Italy again. The Roman senate was, therefore, forced to convince an already exhausted people that war was imminent and that only a vote for war would ensure the defense of the peninsula against Hannibal. Religion was used as the principal tactic to pressure the voters to accept the policy. Indeed, Livy records a version of the speech delivered by the consul Sulpicius on behalf of the war measure. The immortal gods are held up to the Roman citizens as the

chief instigators of this political program.[4] The manipulation of the ordinary citizens through an emotional obedience to religion as the author of State policy became a widespread practice in Plautus' day.[5]

During the same period there were instances when prominent religious positions were assigned out of order. In 212 B.C. P. Licinius, who was about to declare candidacy for the office of curule aedile, was elected pontifex maximus ('chief priest'). With only a single exception during the previous century and a half, no one had succeeded to this office 'unless he had occupied the seat of the curule aedile' (qui sella curuli non sedisset). The tradition of proceeding through an 'orderly rank' (cursus honorum) to the higher offices, such as the sacred magistracies, was a revered practice. Its neglect, a commonplace in Plautus' lifetime, indicates a deterioration both in an awareness of the propriety of fostering religious custom and in the respectability of the position of pontifex maximus.[6]

The decline in religious belief, at least as it was expressed through the public responsibilities of the State cult, defines the nature of the skepticism of religion in Plautus' generation.[7] It is clear that his comedies could have been a significant force in shaping the outlook of the Roman people towards their traditional beliefs. The single most persuasive scholarly argument on the relevance of Plautus' incorporation of religious material in his plays has been that of Hazel Tolliver in an article entitled "Plautus and the State Gods of Rome".[8] She believes that in an age already marked by dangerous social turbulence and religious upheaval the 'casual' inclusion by Plautus of "all degrees of disrespect for the gods" helped to publicize

and to increase an attitude of irreverence and cynicism.[9] Her views may be summarized as follows. There is a tendency in Plautus to reduce the gods to a human level by insisting that the audience see how alike god is to mortal man. Even the sacred aura that should be maintained in the shrines is sometimes treated in a disdainful way. Such impropriety must lead, the author claims, to a derogation, in the audience's opinion, of the sacred meaning of the worship conducted at temples. As examples of the latter practice, Tolliver mentions the words of Daemones in Rudens, who complains of sometimes having to furnish utensils for those offering sacrifices at the temple of Venus located next to his home. The sale of courtesans at Venus' festival in Poenulus is another type of irreligious occurrence. Moreover, mortals are occasionally seen offering advice or reproaches to the gods. Tolliver believes that these speeches would encourage in the audience a spirit of flippancy towards the majesty of the deities involved. Such a flippancy would have been far more damaging to the credibility of divinity, she argues, than the presentation of open defiance of the gods by certain disreputable characters in the plays. Finally, Tolliver reduces the artistic purpose of Plautus to that of a plain desire to make the audience laugh by whatever means required. The insult done to the dignity of religion and its innumerable sanctities is excused by Tolliver as unintentional on Plautus' part. Yet the good fun contained in his art must be balanced, argues Tolliver, with its content of "irreverent witticisms and shameless travesties [that contributed] to the gradual weakening of public loyalty to the State gods".[10]

In a recent book entitled Roman Laughter Erich Segal follows Tolliver's arguments to their logical conclusion by denying any serious purpose to Plautus: "his art does not give rise to thoughtful laughter".[11] Plautus' dramatic objective is cathartic in nature, in that the playwright intentionally banished any concern with "mortality and morality" from the stage. Segal claims that Plautus used the theatre as a kind of 'safety valve' for the expression of repressed emotions which were the product of and fostered by the mos maiorum. Comedy is defined as a production aimed for presentation during the holiday celebrations when people gave free rein to their desires. The license of comedy to show on the stage the breaking of social rules is itself a parallel to the cultural heritage of festivals which were originally instituted as days of relaxation and of the enjoyment, within controlled limits, of behaviour not normally permitted.[12] Plautus' overturning of the Roman sense of decorum and, particularly, of the value of religion in the life of man is, for Segal, an inevitable fact of his art, for "those who live to please, must please to live".[13]

The views of Tolliver and Segal on the scope of Plautus' artistic purpose and on the meaning of the religious activity found in his plays is narrow and wrongheaded. Their inability to discern the serious import behind the hilarious misbehaviour in individual scenes is disturbing because it turns Plautus into a buffoon who spliced together portions of Greek New Comedy in Latin translation and then catered his material to the lowest denominator in the audience. This simply is not true.

It has been demonstrated in the two previous chapters which treat of the many sacred customs and rites seen in the comedies, such as the tributary sacrifice, the reading of omens, and the devout and familiar attendance at temples, that Plautus was acutely aware of the important role played by religion in the lives of the people who supported his dramatic art. The many abuses of religion that had crept into the performance of sacred ritual in the State cult must have bothered him as it did others in his society. That he used his poetry to address the subject of religion is attested by the constant portrayal on stage of characters engaged in religious activities. His characters often proclaim their interpretation of the events that happen as possessing a religious signficance whose spiritual value to them is clear and deeply felt. Significantly, Plautus concerns himself mainly with the sanctities and religious beliefs that form the daily habits of the private citizen. He seems to suggest that a thoughtful ordering of one's personal religious perspective is the best mainstay given the disreputable condition of public religion. His characters recognize the gods' ability to intervene and to guide the direction of their lives for punitive or beneficial reasons. On one occasion, Plautus goes out of his way to infuse a religious significance into a scene with no ostensible religious content. The quiet piety of the matron, Dorippa, in Mercator, as she offers a branch of laurel to Apollo at the altar of her neighbor, is a touching lesson on the real meaning of religion. The audience is instructed in the dignity of preserving old devotional habits. If the only or chief purpose of Plautus were, as Tolliver and Segal believe, to extract and to play upon the silly humour contained

in human foibles, surely the poet would never have sacrificed an opportunity of poking fun at religion and its empty claims.

The purpose of this concluding chapter of the thesis is to answer the arguments proferred by Tolliver and Segal. It has been necessary first to establish Plautus' lack of responsibility for the historic events that led, in his own period, to a loss of respect for the dignity of State religion. It was the patrician class, and not Plautus, who used religion as a means of further dividing the social classes and of controlling, for their own advantage, the management of Roman government. Secondly, it has been shown that Plautus does not demean the worth of religious practices. They assist mankind in sustaining the pax deorum ('peace of the gods'). There remains the issue of Plautus' attitude towards the gods and his portrayal of the moral behaviour in man that reflects a belief in the gods. Amphitruo provides an extensive and unique delineation of Iuppiter, father of gods and men. An examination of this play reveals Plautus' ability to combine good fun with a view of divinity that shows the underlying majesty of godhood and its relationship to man. In the second portion of the chapter there is a discussion of pietas and fides, the ethical values that Plautus closely connects with the dutiful respect given to god and with the spirit of trust and honesty that guides man's relationship with his fellow man.

Before treating Amphitruo it seems proper to respond to some of the specific passages quoted earlier that are interpreted by Tolliver as examples of Plautus' 'flippant' treatment of the gods. The scholar is troubled by the numerous, though minor, instances in the plays in

which gods and men are compared. In Poenulus (278) Agorastocles compares the beauty of his beloved Adelphasium to that of Venus. The exaggeration of his praise is exactly that - exaggeration and nothing more. His slave Milphio is unimpressed with the courtesan's special feminine qualities; Agorastocles boasts of seeing a 'Venus' without parallel, even among the gods, in order to communicate the greatness of her hold over him. The young lover intends no disrespect for Venus, nor would the audience be likely to receive his words in any way other than as the passionate prattle of a love-sick fool. There is a similar vein of light-heartedness conveyed by the boast of the braggart soldier in Truculentus; his only purpose in viewing himself as 'Mars' is to impress and overwhelm his mistress with his prowess. In Casina (II, 331-337) the master's comparison of himself to Iuppiter and the subsequent remarks of the bailiff on the disappointing way such human 'Iuppiters' have of dying intends no disrespect. The bailiff wants the protection that only his master can provide; he is worried about his master's plan to make love with Casina and its possible repercussions upon himself. In a quite human way, the bailiff is reminding the old man of his real human limitations and of the fact that words are just words. In all these passages Plautus portrays men as they are, with their weaknesses and vanities. They speak as would the men in the audience, quickly and without regard for any deeper meaning than the momentary emotion that goads them. It is silly to blame Plautus for a casual flippancy in situations in which his artistic ability to draw human nature is so obvious. The ease with which Plautine characters

make parallels between their own existence and that of the gods rather suggests the intimate bond between themselves and their divinities.

Similarly in Rudens (I, 131-136), when Daemones grumbles of having to furnish utensils for those offering sacrifice at Venus' temple, it is not his or Plautus' purpose to derogate the shrine. Quite the opposite. In response to the wealthy young Athenian Plesidippus who is searching near the temple for the two shipwrecked maidens, Daemones says:

> "No my boy, I haven't seen anyone come here to make sacrifice for a good many days now. And when I do, I see them alright - they always drop in to get water or fire or borrow dishes or a knife or a spit or a cooking pot or something. You'd think I kept a kitchen and a well for Venus and not myself. But they've left me alone for quite a while now."[14]

In the context of the comedy Daemones is presented as a pious man, one sensitive to the careless behaviour of those who come to sacrifice at the goddess' temple next door. His words verge on irreverence, perhaps because of his anger that others arrive unprepared to fulfill the holy rites and bankrupt him in the process. His generosity is unquestionable as is the protective role that he plays in rescuing the helpless young women from the clutches of the leno later in the play; Daemones speaks of Venus as a neighbour who 'borrows' from him too readily, but his willingness to serve the needs of worship at her shrine is clear.

Finally, Tolliver is disturbed by the sale of courtesans at the temple of Venus in Poenulus. The practice was certainly also considered immoral on the dies festi by the members of Plautus' audience. Its incorporation into the dramatic action is purposeful. Business trans-

actions of any sort on the dies festi were forbidden. Defiance of this taboo would attract the audience's attention to the person who dared to pervert the ancient custom. The crass materialism of the leno Lycus who seeks to sell Adelphasium and her sister at Venus' temple, is portrayed in several telling ways during the play. There is a deliberate use of the theme of the business transaction to evoke a sympathetic response for the plight of the two women who are to be sold. They have no rights, no real home, and not even the opportunity to enjoy the festival of Venus on the same relaxed terms as do others in the play. Hence Tolliver is incorrect to read the "jollity at divine expense" as superficially as she does. The vanity of Adelphasium is funny; the intrigues of Agorastocles to trap the leno are clever and amusing, but the abuse of Venus' sacred place is deplorable. The audience cannot fail to see Plautus' point.

I

Amphitruo

The comedy is remarkable among the works of Plautus. It has been recognized as a special piece chiefly because of the inclusion of an extensive portrait of Iuppiter. The god not only appears on stage as an actor, but also makes an epiphany in the last scene.[15] There is a consensus that Amphitruo is Plautus' most religious play. Interpretation of its meaning, however, has been hampered by a failure to distinguish correctly the reason for the dual nature of Iuppiter as developed by Plautus. The god has seemed to most critics an unjust 'man' and an illicit trickster:

> "The very fact that such a play could be produced suggests that popular respect for the Graeco-Roman gods was running low. Otherwise the chief of these gods could hardly have been portrayed as a creature without dignity or moral principles who went about like a cheap magician using his divine power to help him seduce innocent women .... A god who looks and acts lik a mortal can logically expect to be judged more or less according to human standards .... A human being is unlikely to maintain for long his confidence in a god not superior to himself. If Jupiter took on, in the common mind, the aspect of a cheating philanderer and Mercury the semblance of a tricky slave, they were certainly no longer superior to mortals; In fact they were placed on a level with character types far from admirable."[16]

Iuppiter's characterization is complex presenting alternatively human and divine facets of being.[17] In his guise as a man Iuppiter usurps the perogatives of Amphitruo by making love to the latter's wife, Alcmena. The god assumes the human form of her husband (Prologue, 121-122). Mercury, the son of Iuppiter, also takes on a dual role in the comedy. As a deity he serves as Iuppiter's messenger to the audience in the Prologue; the spectators are immediately told Iuppiter's plan to grace the line of Amphitruo and Alcmena with the birth of a special child, Hercules. The themes of a god's visitation among the human race and of the fathering of demi-gods are commonplace in ancient tradition. Plautus is careful to connect Iuppiter's sexual desires with his intention of honouring the womanhood of Alcmena (V, 1132-1143):

> "All will be well. Dismiss the soothsayers; I shall describe your future and your past better than any seer, for I am Jove. It was I, Jove, who lay with Alcmena, it was on her that I begot a son though when you left she was with child by you. These two, my own and yours, she bore together, and mine will bring your house undying fame. Live as you used to with Alcmena, in love and mutual trust. She did no wrong - it was my strength. Now I return to heaven."[18]

Thus the supposed 'rape' of Alcmena, that may at first titillate the audience's imagination, is actually presented as Iuppiter's means of bestowing an immortal reputation upon Amphitruo as a warrior and upon Alcmena as a dutiful wife. The god's arrival is not really an intrusion, as it may first appear, upon Amphitruo's home. Plautus uses the motivation of Iuppiter to establish, for the audience's consideration, the nature of the personal traits displayed by the couple that have merited the god's admiration and benefaction.

The act of mating is the central theme of the initial portion of the comedy. Iuppiter's passion for Alcmena is described as causing a miracle in nature. Time stops while Iuppiter embraces Alcmena; the constellations cease their normal movement through the heavens; the darkness of the long night does not give way to Dawn (e.g., I, 272-288; I, 544-550). The love-making is shrouded in darkness, its details left to the human imagination. The mystery that envelops the physical act adds to its magic; there is a secret bond between Iuppiter and Alcmena, one that will be finally made clear in the miraculous birth of twin offspring at the play's conclusion. But Iuppiter's herald is sent to the audience to tell them the truth about the mating. This dramatic strategy allows them a special position in the unfolding of the destiny that is to come upon Amphitruo's house.

The exceptional meaning of the night of love-making is also indicated by Mercury. In the Prologue the god refers to Plautus' work as a 'tragic-comedy' (59), thereby drawing our attention to the fact that only this work contains a reworking by Plautus, of a famous legend. The serious intention of the playwright becomes even more obvious when

Mercury asserts that plain comedy is an insufficient medium to treat of the exploits of kings and gods (61). Plautus constructs the information given in the Prologue so that the audience may balance the 'human' side of Iuppiter's presence on the stage with his 'divine' purpose which is to reshape the course of mortal life in Amphitruo's household.

Iuppiter's appearance in mortal form in the first part of the play has been regarded by critics as a sign of the diminished importance of godhood. The usual argument is that Plautus has lost an awe of the gods and that his blurring of the proper distinction between divine and human existence betrays his careless attitude. The dramatic purpose of Iuppiter's human guise escapes the critics' notice. Plautus may be intentionally reminding the audience of man's inability to withstand a complete revelation of divine essence. Many in the audience would remember the fate of the human Semele in myth, who desired not only to mate with but also to behold Zeus. Her body is described, by Dionysus in the Prologue of Euripides' Bacchae, as blasted apart by the fiery light of Zeus' radiance. Iuppiter shows his concern for the mortality of Alcmena by taking on a form that her being can tolerate.

The god also exhibits a regard for Alcmena's dignity as a married woman. It would have been easy if Plautus' objective had been to denigrate godhood, to describe a rape of Alcmena, done by Iuppiter in some human form other than that of her husband. The fact that this does not occur is significant. Iuppiter shows himself conscious of Alcmena's reputation when he takes on the guise of Amphitruo. The delineation of Alcmena throughout the comedy suggests that she is a woman of high moral standard, who would not knowingly bring shame upon

her household. The physical pleasure of the sexual act and the affection that exists between Alcmena and her 'husband' as she bids goodbye to Amphitruo/Iuppiter in the morning are made real to the audience only because Iuppiter has thoughtfully protected Alcmena from the full meaning of her surrender to him. Plautus develops the relationship between Iuppiter and Alcmena as one of a god who responds in a sensitive and protective way to a woman who is noble and deserving to bear his seed.[19]

The play includes the birth of twins (Hercules by Iuppiter and Iphicles by Amphitruo). Dualities fill the play and are a significant factor in an interpretation of the play's meaning. For the purpose of this study it is sufficient to note that Iuppiter was not required to preserve the birthright of Amphitruo's son. In fact, the god reveals a desire to single out Amphitruo for an even greater portion of fame than the mortal's victorious feats in battle have earned him. At the play's conclusion (V, 1139-1140) Iuppiter says to Amphitruo:

> nostro qui est susceptus semine,
> suis factis te inmortali adficiet gloria.
>
> (the one begotten of my seed shall win you undying glory by his deeds.)

Amphitruo is proclaimed, for the audience, a worthy father, and one whom Iuppiter entrusts with the upbringing of his own child. The birth of the twins is itself a miracle. Alcmena is blessed with a painless delivery; her sons are born to the accompaniment of Iuppiter's thunder claps; Hercules rises from the cradle to protect himself and his mortal brother from the murderous snake sent by Iuppiter's jealous wife,

Iuno. The birth of twins may remind the audience of the cherished legends about the twin founders of their own State, Romulus and Remus.

Plautus does not present the actions of Iuppiter as clandestine nor as aimed to harm irreparably the happiness of Amphitruo and Alcmena. The visitation made by Iuppiter is the god's method of acclaiming publicly the fact that the mortal pair are the ideal representatives of Roman woman and manhood. Nowhere is the god's majesty or power denied. In order to enter the human world, and particuarly to make himself manifest on Plautus' stage, Iuppiter has deigned to become a man for a brief time. At all times during the course of the play his godhood is stressed. Mercury (45) speaks of Iuppiter as deorum regnator ('ruler of the gods'); Alcmena (831) swears an oath per supremi regis regnum ('by the kingdom of the supreme king'); Bromia the servant refers to him (1122) as imperator divom atque hominum ('ruler of gods and men'). His omnipotence is further emphasized because he is always in control of his own being and of the events that take place around him. For example, when the love-making is complete, Iuppiter bids nature (I, 546):

> Nox, quae me mansisti, mitto ut concedas die,
>
> (Night, you who have lingered for me, I dismiss you:
> give way to day.)

Elsewhere, Iuppiter's loving protection of Alcmena's double pregnancy and the power that he possesses to give or to take life is affirmed for the audience by Mercury (I, 479-490):

> "Oh yes - Alcmena, as I've failed to mention this very day is going to bear twin boys, one being a seven-months child and one a ten. One is Amphitryon's son, the other Jove's: ... Because he loves Alcmena, Jupiter has settled that both sons be born at once, two labors coming to a single birth...."[20]

Moreover, Iuppiter never attempts to escape the responsibility he incurs of disrupting the mortal household for a time. The god shows himself fully aware of the distress that will befall the matron and of his duty toward her (III, 871-872):

> nam mea sit culpa, quod egomet contraxerim,
> si id Alcumenae innocenti expetat.
>
> (For it would be my fault if I let Alcmena, though innocent, take the consequences of what I have contrived.)

Iuppiter speaks these words while in his human presence on stage. Terms such as culpa ('blame', 'wrongdoing') and innocens ('without fault') denote the human issues that Plautus, through Iuppiter, wishes to call to the attention of the audience. The god understands how easily his actions can be misinterpreted in the minds of mortal men; he is conscious of the gossip that could damage the reputation of Alcmena and her right to remain the wife of Amphitruo. In his desire to reward the valued couple and to beget through their assistance a demi-god who will become famous as a benefactor of mankind,[21] Iuppiter never loses sight of the effects of his plans upon the human beings involved. The god instructs the audience in how attentive his divinity is to the needs of men. His sense of majesty is not so great that he can forget the good name of a woman. His wish to father a legendary Hercules has not blinded him to the importance of reconciling husband with wife.

Plautus develops through the dual personality of Iuppiter in Amphitruo those elements of godhood that he wishes to impress upon his audience. The god is always sovereign in an ability to manipulate events as he wishes. His power to affect the world of man and nature is unquestionable and recognized by everyone in the play. Iuppiter is concerned with mankind. The birth of Hercules who became one of the most popular gods in the Roman world because of his physical achievements, attests to the goodwill of Iuppiter as the supreme father of all. The comedy reveals Iuppiter as a god who plans his actions carefully and with a regard for their appropriate setting in the mortal sphere. The human form that Iuppiter assumes does not reduce the stature of divinity, but it rather shows his acceptance of the dignity of human life. The mating of Alcmena is symbolic of Iuppiter's wish to bond a friendship between man and god. If it is true that Plautus must sacrifice some of Iuppiter's spiritual mystery by the presentation of him briefly as a human being with human weaknesses, perhaps the benefits derived from such a delineation outweigh any notion to the poet of an irreverent attitude. Plautus constantly reiterates in the plays the ways in which religious activity enriches human experience. The physical identification possible between man and god and the closeness of the relationship when both beings are mutually attentive are, for Plautus, what constitutes the value of religion.

II

Moral Attitudes

Pietas

Cicero speaks of pietas as an all inclusive ethical virtue that summarized for the Roman mind, man's obligations towards the gods,[22] towards his country, and towards his parents or other blood relations.[23] Significantly, the famous statesman of the Republic also extended the definition to include the duty of respect paid to the people of foreign countries.[24] The modern critic Segal describes pietas as "the corner-stone of Roman morality".[25] Indeed, it is correct to say that in the Roman literature following the death of Plautus, pietas became identified with a spirit of self-sacrifice and with the repression of human desires if these were in opposition to the common good of the family, the nation, or contravened religious responsibility. The figure most closely associated with the ideal of pietas was Aeneas, the legendary progenitor of Roman civilization in Vergil's Aeneid. The standard of conduct required by such a virtue was a heavy responsibility imposed upon the ordinary Roman. Its inclusion in Plautus' works may appear somewhat surprising at first because the somber lifestyle required by pietas runs counter to the merriment and the breaches of conduct that are basic in the delineation of character in comedy.

Pietas finds expression in Plautus' works as a habit of behaviour towards the gods, towards the family and towards strangers. Plautus does not seem interested in examining its patriotic associations,

perhaps because his comedies, unlike those of Aristophanes, make few allusions to political matters.

In the Prologue of Rudens Plautus establishes a view of the gods as beings who watch over and respond to human action. Arcturus calls Iuppiter imperator divom atque hominum ('the ruler of gods and men'); it is he who has assigned each god his territory of action which specifically includes the evaluation of human behaviour, that is, their deference to pietas and their preservation of trust (11-12, qui facta hominum moresque, pietatem et fidem noscamus,). The term mores ('the total of human custom and personal traits') is defined by the virtues of pietas and fides. These virtues are in the preserve of Iuppiter, who does not simply view mankind in a passive way. Arcturus speaks of Iuppiter as a divine judge (Prologue, 15-29):

> "From day to day he knows precisely who here on earth is out to do wrong. When rascals go into a trial ready to perjure themselves and trick a judge (iudex) into awarding them the verdict, he reopens the case, reviews it, and passes a sentence so stiff it far outweighs whatever they may have won. In another set of records he keeps a list of the good. And if the wicked have the idea that they can get on it by winning him over with gifts and offerings, they're wasting their time. Why? Because he has no mercy for men who are two-faced. The appeal of the honest man (si qui pius) finds favor far more easily than that of the wicked (qui scelestust) despite all their gifts. And so I advise those of you who are good, who live your lives in reverence (cum pietate) and honesty (cum fide), to go on in this way so that you may reap your reward in time to come."[26]

Later in Rudens Daemones, who is shown to be a respectable and a socially conscious individual in his concern for the welfare of the helpless, gives voice to the connection he sees between human behaviour and its reward or punishment by the gods (IV, 1193-1194):

satin si quoii homini di esse bene factum volunt,
aliquo illud pacto optingit optatum piis?

(Isn't it a fact that if the gods wish to help a man, somehow it happens that the prayers of the pious are answered?)

The special favours of the gods are seen by Daemones to come to those who actively cultivate their relationship with the gods. The root of the verb obtingo, which denotes the idea of 'touching', further suggests the closeness of the personal contact with god that may be experienced by the man who attends to the ideal of pietas.

Plautus' development of Daemones provides a good study of the elements included in pietas. A significant feature of Daemones is Plautus' placement of his residence next to the temple of Venus in Cyrene. His lifestyle is simple; his financial means few. Arcturus explains the reason for Daemones' exile from Athens as caused by the man's overly kind nature (Prologue, 35-38):

"He's not a bad man; he didn't leave his homeland because of any wrong he had done. Its simply that, in helping others (alios servat), he got himself involved and through his generosity, dissipated a hard-earned fortuen."[27]

As has been earlier discussed, Daemones is frequently requested by visitors to Venus' shrine to supply them the ritual items of sacrifice. In his impoverished condition this works a hardship on Daemones, on that he complains about. Nonetheless, he regards it as a duty. Plautus shows in this reference that following the ideal of pietas is not without difficulty for mankind; Daemones is hard pressed to serve the needs of Venus' alter; his complaints express a temptation to wander from the ideal, but his actions do not. The geographic close-

ness of the dwellings of Daemones and Venus perhaps symbolizes the specialness of Daemones who is continually aware, because of the financial sacrifices he makes, of the meaning of an attitude of deference to the gods.[28]

When Daemones (III, 650) is told that the leno Labrax has desecrated the sanctity of Venus' altar by attempting to drag away the two suppliant women lodged there, he angrily shouts:

> quis istic est qui deos tam parvi pendit?
>
> (What sort of man is he who in a place such as this considers the gods as worth so little?)

The man who is pius knows that temples and altars are honoured as sanctuaries. Daemones acknowledges Venus' altar as an asylum for the helpless shipwrecked maidens; the goddess is their protector; she has guaranteed them safety in her shrine. Daemones expression of shock at the license taken by the leno both condemns the man's actions in spoiling the sacred precinct and calls the audience's attention to the blasphemy of a man who considers financial profit to be the guide of human conduct.[29]

The characterization of Alcmena in Amphitruo provides another facet in the meaning of pietas. The handmaid speaks of her mistress (1086) as pia et pudica ('pious and chaste'). The collocation of the two terms is important because it establishes that for a woman the preservation of her sexual dignity was of primary concern to the gods and her family. Plautus is careful to show, however, that while Alcmena is deferential to her husband in all matters that fall under his control,

she does not assume a complacent or meek role in the household. Alcmena herself outlines for Amphitruo the duties of a pious Roman matron (II, 839-841):

> "There's a second dowry that I brought: Chastity, self-control, propriety, love for my parents and our gods and you, and for you, all a wife's warmth and devotion."[30]

When Iuppiter in the guise of Amphitruo tells Alcmena that he must leave her to return to his men in the harbour, Alcmena is distressed and confused by his departure. Her husband has been gone a year and the night of love has re-awakened the bonds of tender affection between the two. As a woman she expresses her reluctance to let him go and her anger at the brevity of his stay at home. Nonetheless, she yields to her husband's military duties, requesting only that he continue to love her while away (542). In her obedience to the greater public responsibilities of her husband, Alcmena is reminiscent of Plautus' portrayal of the wives in Stichus (I, 7-8):

> nostrum officium
> nos facere aequomst
> neque id magi' facimus
> quam nos monet pietas.
>
> (It's our duty; it's only right that we do it [i.e. to remain loyal to absent husbands and their cause], and what we do is nothing more than what pietas dictates.)

The test of Alcmena's pietas in the play comes over the issue of her chastity. The events that cause her sexual purity to be attacked have been discussed earlier in this chapter. Alcmena is unafraid to speak on her own behalf, even if it requires a bold face before her

husband and his slave Sosia. The self-confidence that she exhibits in her struggle to answer Amphitruo's doubts and insinuations portrays, for the audience, the strength that underlies a true acquisition of pietas. When she swears that no man has touched her body (832 ff.), Alcmena exclaims that the innocent have no reason to fear defending themselves with spirit (835-836). This sort of audacia ('boldness') is good; it upholds and gives witness to the possession of pietas. Alcmena is willing to surrender everything, her household, the gifts she has received, even the safety of domesticity, in order to preserve the truth of her sexual purity. (882 ff.)

In the portraits of Daemones and Alcmena, Plautus examines the virtue of pietas in contrastive ways. Both characters are strong figures who have a clear perception of the kind of conduct that is required if the dignity of their own persons is to be maintained and if that same deference is to be shown to others. For Daemones pietas is vitally linked to a close communion with the gods, their sacred rites and place of residence. Even his name contains a play on the Greek word for 'Spirits' or 'Divinities' (δαίμονες). Plautus develops Daemones as a liberal and kindly gentleman who extends the courtesies he pays to the gods to all others who seek his assistance. Without being required, Daemones has come to the rescue of the helpless maidens sheltered in Venus' temple. In the Prologue of Rudens Arcturus declared Iuppiter's fostering of the man who is pius. This doctrine is borne out in the gifts that the god bestows upn Daemones for his selfless protection of the women. One of the girls is found to be the long lost daughter of the old man. The joy that he expresses upon having

been reunited with his daughter and what the discovery has meant to his wife show the happy side of following a demanding ideal. Significantly, Daemones begins his joyous speech with an invocation to the immortal gods (1191) and concludes it with the information that he and his wife are about to undertake a sacrifice of thanksgiving to their household Lares (1207).

The pietas of Alcmena consists in the exemplary way that she grasps the fullness of her duties as a Roman matron. She yields to her husband in the matters that pertain to his proper role as a Roman military leader. She shows herself not only attentive to the running of her household, but also capable of expressing the tenderness required for a happy union of husband and wife. Plautus never sacrifices her image as a human being in order to describe the meaning of pietas in her life. Indeed, Alcmena herself has a good sense of what is owed to her as the wife of a celebrated military hero. She fearlessly demands recognition of her pietas, which in the circumstances of the play is closely identified with her sexual purity. It is paradoxical that Alcmena is forced to enter into a battle of sorts in order to make Amphitruo understand how important the preservation of her dignity as his wife is to her. She will tolerate no insult to that portion of her identity that is so closely allied to himself. The courage and nerve that she displays in a defense of her purity do not undermine the meaning of pietas as deference to one's superiors. It is clear that for her to throw over the issue of her purity in order to please a man would be the same as destroying the ideal itself. Plautus has constructed the play in such a way that Alcmena's successful testing in

the matter of pietas becomes the primary reason why she is deserving to become the mother of Hercules by Iuppiter. She proves herself a fitting woman to carry the god who was to become, for the Romans, one of the greatest benefactors in human life.

In conclusion, it must be noted that Plautus has been severely criticized by Segal for his portrayal of pietas. He argues that there are numerous instances where characters are seen mocking Rome's most solemn religious precept.[31] The majority of his examples are derived from scenes wherein sons show a lack of respect for their fathers, or slaves for their masters. Segal is incorrect, in my opinion, to build an argument for the deliberate blasphemy intended by Plautus in such scenes upon the fact that in Roman religion matters of faith and morals were notoriously guarded and strict. The critic himself admits that comedy seems to have been, from its institution as part of the various dies festi, a genre in which behaviour of a boisterous and unbecoming sort was not only tolerated, but even encouraged. If it is true, as Segal argues, that "nothing is sacred in the world of Plautus; irreverence is endemic",[32] perhaps the reason why Plautus chose this mode of composition pertains to the nature of the theatre as a public forum. If religion mattered not at all to Plautus, there would not be the continual portrayal in the plays of virtuous people such as Daemones and Alcmena, and certainly no place given to religious rituals and omens. Religion would be in such a negative viewpoint a matter of lip service. The fact that young men pressured by love affairs or unpaid debts burst out in anger at parents (e.g. Philolaches in Mostellaria, I, 233-234) does not demonstrate that Plautus, nor the characters them-

selves, scorn the value of pietas. The emotion is rather geared to the scene and to the real presentation of character. The examination of emotional outbursts that may betray irreligious or dangerous inclinations in men is part of the pageantry of comedy. Comedy provides a vent for unhealthy emotion; more importantly, it gives members of the audience an opportunity to see vicariously the problems that often cause distress and crisis in private life. The audience is enabled to judge the motives that compel men to act badly; Plautus always shows the results, happy or punitive, of human behaviour.

III

Fides

Fides in Plautus is the fulfilment of the contractual or legal obligations into which one enters. It also includes man's loyalty in the discharging of whatever he has promised by oath or vow.[33] Fides is the complement to pietas, as indicated in the Prologue of Amphitruo, because it denotes the reciprocal trust that men place in each other in the sight of the gods. Fides may also be understood to describe a more intimate link between man and god, and one that is bound up with prayer, in that men are seen in the plays promising something to a god in return for aid or protection.

The most interesting instance of a vow is found in Amphitruo (III, 947-948) where Iuppiter himself prepares to offer a sacrifice to the gods in honour of their having fulfilled a vow that he had undertaken. There is no intention of parody in the scene. Iuppiter is speaking, to be sure, in the guise of Amphitruo. While it may be correct to see him

attempting, by his reference to a vow and its repayment through sacrifice, to reinforce his human identity in Alcmena's eyes, the audience is fully aware of his divinity. To them both the vow and the sacrifice may appear so important a part of a man's preparation for battle and of his thanksgiving for surviving death that even a god cannot overlook the practices. At the very least, Iuppiter emphasizes for the audience the appropriateness of fulfiling a promise given to god. Sosia, the slave of Amphitruo, had earlier mentioned in a lengthy description of his master's prowess in war that Amphitruo realized the seriousness of the military occasion and had made a vow to Iuppiter before battle (I, 229-230).

In Rudens there is a profanation of a vow, one committed by the leno Labrax. Although he had accepted money from a young man in partial payment for one of his girls, Labrax tricks the youth by telling him that he is going to Venus' temple to pay out a vow made to the goddess (Prologue, 60). In fact, the leno sails away from Cyrene taking the maiden with him. It is noteworthy that the leno does not carry off the sacrilege. Arcturus who is the spokesman in the comedy for the just regime of Iuppiter, tells the audience of the fierce storm at sea that has wrecked Labrax' ship and ruined his plot. By the play's conclusion the leno is stripped of all profit, and the girls, whose well-being means nothing to him, have found secure positions in Cyrene.

There are many examples of oaths in the comedies. Most of them are sworn by men. The only exception to this occurs in the Amphitruo when Alcmena swears an oath. Iuppiter was regarded as the Roman god of

oaths; one of his cult titles (Dius Fidius) attests to this function.[34] Oaths are generally sworn to Iuppiter alone in the plays (e.g. Cap., II, 426 and Men., V, 1025), but at times they may include the name of one or more other gods (e.g. Mil., V, 1414; Men., IV, 615 and V, 811). The selection of a deity to accompany Iuppiter as a witness of an oath is usually dictated by the character who requires divine testimony. For example, a soldier in Plautus would understandably swear his oath by Mars, 'the patron god of soldiers' (patronus deus militum) together with Iuppiter. In Rudens there occurs the single instance of an oath sworn to a god other than Iuppiter. It is appropriate that Gripus makes the leno Labrax swear an oath by Venus, the goddess whom the trickster had earlier profaned through a false vow.

The swearing of oaths is regarded as a serious matter in Plautus. When Alcmena acts in an extraordinary way for a woman by swearing an oath to Iuppiter that she has not committed adultery (Amph., II, 831-834), she combines the god's name with that of his wife Iuno whom she calls the 'matron goddess'. Alcmena is correct in that no 'mortal' has seduced her, but it was rather the god, Iuppiter. The impact of her oath is even stronger in that it is not only true, but also witnessed in spirit by Iuppiter. His participation in the dramatic action of the play makes him divinely present on stage at all times. It is ironical that the very god Alcmena prays will attest to her fidelity has brought her fidelity into question. But whatever irony there is in the scene of the oath-taking must be balanced against the audience's awareness that the god must acknowledge Alcmena's sexual

loyalty. She has called him to witness and oaths are in Iuppiter's sacred trust.

The act of taking an oath required as part of its verbal expression the assuming of a curse if the oath were unfulfilled.[35] In Aulularia (IV, 771-776) the miser Euclio has accused Lyconides of stealing his pot of gold. Lyconides is forced to swear an oath (Dic bona fide: Give me your word of honour) that he neither stole the gold nor knows the individual who did. In order to prove to Euclio that he speaks the truth, Lyconides promises:

> tum me faciat quod volt magnus Iuppiter.
> (Then may mighty Iuppiter deal with me as he sees fit!)

Similarly, Iuppiter responds to Alcmena's distress at her insulting treatment at the hands of Amphitruo by swearing (III, 931-934) that he (now in the guise of Amphitruo) believes her:

> I swear that I believe my wife is chaste (pudicam).
> If I deceive you in this, then supreme Iuppiter,
> I invoke your curse upon Amphritruo forevermore.

There is a playful double meaning in Iuppiter's oath in the minds of the audience, but for Alcmena it is a serious matter. She is upset and disturbed by the harm that her 'husband' may have called upon himself. She cries out (III, 935):

> A, propitius sit potius.
> (Oh no! invoke rather his blessing!)

Those who fail to regard the swearing of oaths as a serious matter are always punished in Plautus. For example, in Aulularia the

existence of Fides as an actual shrine and cult is incorporated by the poet into the action of the play. Some of Plautus' viewers may have been aware of the ancient origin of the goddess. The cult was so old that no record existed of a time when she was not worshipped by the Romans.[36] Euclio loses his gold in the play because he refuses to believe that the goddess will be loyal. In return Fides withdraws her protective care of the miser's hoard of gold.

(III)

It is obvious from an examination of the variety of religious practices found in the plays of Plautus that religion, as expressed in innumerable daily activities, was an important and basic part of the lifestyle of the ordinary Roman. It is equally clear that the poet is not concerned with the reconstruction of a coherent theological system or with the promulgation of religious dogma. What does seem of concern to Plautus is that in a time of deep social and political turmoil, people need the support that can only be provided by their traditional religious ways. Plautus emphasizes the benefits that may be derived from a life that remains in harmony with the needs of others and in continual contact with the protective guidance afforded man by the gods. Iuppiter is held up by Plautus as an extension of the human law court. The god has divided upon the world into spheres wherein all his fellow gods and the spirits of nature watch over and tally up the deeds of men. Nothing goes unobserved or unpaid in the long run. The life that is led in accordance with the moral virtues, pietas and fides, is the life that is honoured by Iuppiter. Daemones and Alcmena

demonstrate by their individual interpretations of pietas, that the virtue is not only an attainable one, but a standard of conduct that brings them the blessings and the material rewards of the gods.

The various religious activities and moral attitudes found in the plays reveal a seriousness and importance which suggests that Plautus did have some religious convictions and was concerned with the positive effect that a properly conducted religious expression could have on the well-being of his audience. If and when fun is poked at religious ways, it does not require that one believe that Plautus is indifferent, or worse, deliberately attempting to insult the dignity of religion. It may be possible that he is trying to secure the shaky beliefs of those in his audience through the healing and instructive art of laughter.

Notes

1. U. Heibges, 1969, 833. Cicero's De Haruspicum Responso provides valuable information for historians of Roman religion to see how the "portents, prophecies and priestly sayings were manipulated by Roman politicians" (846).

2. Polybius (VI. 56. 7-11) comments that the patrician class utilized religion 'to keep members of the plebeian class in their place.'

3. Carey, 1965, 198.

4. Livy, 31. 4 ad fin.:
Huius vobis sententiae non consul modo auctor est, sed etiam di immortales. ('Not only is the consul the originator of the proposal being offered to you, but even the immortal gods.')

5. A few years later (192-189 B.C.) religion was again the instrument employed to encourage the Romans to attack the forces of Antiochus of Syria (solutis religione animis: 'with their uncertainty vanquished by religion'). (Livy, 36. 1.)

6. Later (perhaps in c. 150 B.C.) the Aelian and Fufian laws virtually sanctioned the abuse of divination to comply with political exigencies. The two statutes gave any curule magistrate or tribune the right to obstruct assemblies of the plebs by declaring the reception of unfavourable omens. See Carey (p. 178) and Scullard (1975, 323).

7. Bailey (1932, 167) believes that while a sense of the early religio remained intact, the lack of guidance provided by public ritual must have exercised an adverse effect upon private religion.

8. Classical Journal 48 (1952), 49-77.

9. Ibid., p. 50.

10. Ibid., p. 57.

11. E. Segal, 1968, 14.

12. C.L. Barber (1959, 6) sees a connection between comedy and the holiday occasion. He sees them as "parallel manifestations of the same pattern of culture, of a way that men can cope with their life."

13. Segal, p. 2.

14. L. Casson, 1963, 163.

15. It is unfortunate that the manuscripts have lost some 250 lines of the text at verses 1034 ff. The missing lines may have added substantially to the delineation of the god, since the plot requires his appearance in this portion.

16. Tolliver, p. 54-55.

17. There is an excellent revision of the Amphitruo theme in later playwrights by A.C. Romano (1974, 874-890). The study is heavily influenced by the approach of Tolliver to religious phenomena in Plautus, but Romano's examination of Iuppiter's intricate character is valuable.

18. Translation by Constance Currier in P. Bovie, 1970, 195.

19. Duckworth (1952, 150) calls Alcmena the noblest female character in Plautus.

20. Bovie, p. 170-171.

21. Romano (p. 886) defines Iuppiter's method of benefaction as an "inoffensive trick". He sees the focus of the play directed towards the miracles of prodigy and epiphany.

22. Cicero, Nat. Deor., I. 41. 116: est enim pietas iustitia adversos deos ('for pietas consists in the performance of righteous deeds towards the gods').

23. Ibid., De Inv., II. 22. 66.

24. Ibid., De Off., III. 6. 28.

25. Segal, p. 16.

26. Casson, p. 158.

27. Ibid., p. 159.

28. The priestess Ptolemocratia in Rudens also exhibits behaviour that is pia because she is a ready servant of Venus (283), even at the expense of her own comfort. See Ampelisca's speech in Rudens (III, 403-413).

29. Similarly, the leno Ballio in Pseudolus (I, 265-268) is shown as an impious creature by Plautus because he boasts of casting aside all religious activity if it gets in the way of 'making a buck' (si lucri quid detur, 267). He refers to making a profit as pietas. It is significant that Ballio loses his profit in the play; he is forced to repay both Pseudolus' master and the

soldier's orderly; he loses the girl Phoenicium. Even the slave Pseudolus openly censures the leno's blasphemous mockery of the gods (269).

30. Bovie, p. 185.

31. Segal, p. 15-41.

32. Ibid., p. 31.

33. See Hanson (1959, 94-97) for his list of vows and oaths.

34. H. Wagenvoort (1980, 241) says that oaths were usually taken in the open air, in the sight of Iuppiter who served as witness of the fides of oaths.

35. Rose (1926, 220) says that certain priests and priestesses were actually prevented from swearing oaths in early Republican Rome because of the possibility of a curse that could be incurred. Religious personnel were to be protected from bad luck at all times.

36. Rose, 1948, 102. Her importance as a cult figure is indicated by the fact that the three senior flamines ('priests'), the very core of the oldest clergy, who served the three principal gods of the most ancient State cult, went each year to her shrine on the Capitoline Hill to offer sacrifice to her.

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